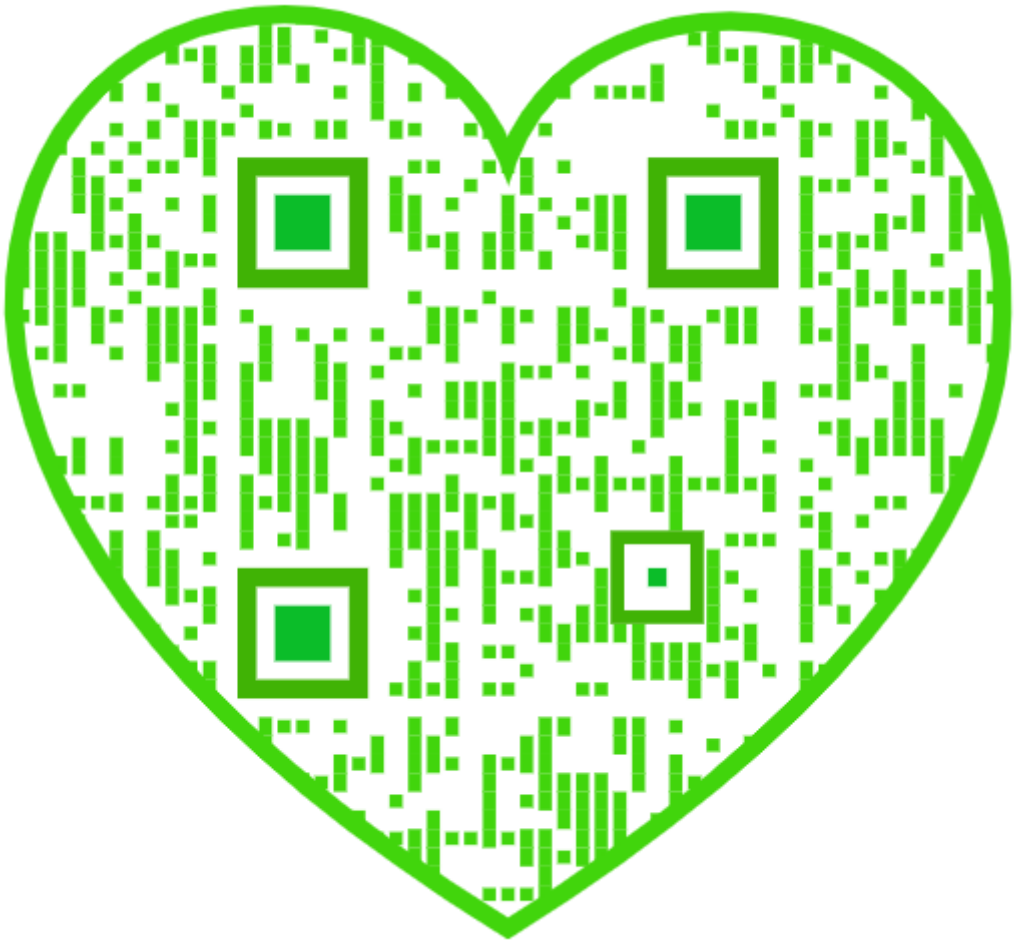
Leather work

Charles Godfrey Leland



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BY

CHARLES G. LELAND, F.R.L.S., M.A.

Late Director of the Public Industrial Art School of Philadelphia; Author of "Practical Education," "A Manual of Wood Carving," "Drawing and Designing," "The Minor Arts," &c. &c.

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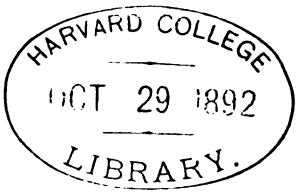

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THE following work is a further contribution to the series of practical manuals of the Minor Arts projected by Mr. Leland. It is hoped that the explicit instructions and the large number of designs, all of which have been drawn expressly for the work, will help to give it as great a popularity as the companion book on Wood-Carving. Most of the designs in the two books are applicable to either art, as are many of those in the manual on "Drawing and Designing."

The author and publishers have to thank Mr. Holtzapffel for his kind assistance in the preparation of the work for the press.

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LEATHER WORK.

TOOLS AND MATERIALS.

LEATHER Work is one of the most fascinating of the minor or decorative arts; many persons who have practised them all give it the preference; some consider it is easier than metal-embossing and wood-carving, and really more remunerative. A careful perusal of this work cannot fail to convince the reader that any person of ordinary intelligence who can draw a little, or even enlarge or reduce patterns mechanically, can master it sufficiently well to turn the results to profitable account.

As regards *designs*, it has been found after a considerable experience that the simplest, even such as a child can be easily trained to make, are by far the best for most work, and that the worst patterns are the very elaborate and difficult. This will plainly appear from the examples which will be given. Those who wish to learn how to design original patterns in the

easiest manner are advised to study the "Manual of Drawing and Design," a cheap little book especially adapted to leather work and similar arts. (London, Whittaker and Co.)

For the simplest leather work very few and cheap imple-

No. 1. No. 2. No. 3.

Fig. 1. TRACING WHEELS.

ments are required even to make very attractive objects. I have seen a good frame well stamped with only a paper-knife for tracer, and a stamp cut with a penknife by making cross bars on the end of a bit of wood. But for thorough work the following should be provided :

Tracing wheels. No. 1 is a little wheel about the size of a threepenny piece; Nos. 2 and 3 are smaller. They should have a smooth dull edge, and be strongly made. Their object is to run lines or indent them in the leather. They are useful for rapid work. There is also the spur-wheel used to prick out patterns, and the dot-wheel, which makes a dotted stamped line on the damp leather.

Fig. 2. COMMON TRACER.

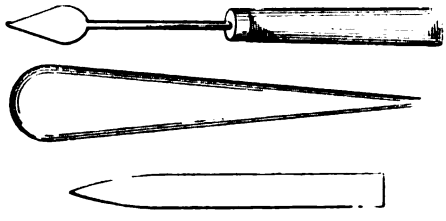


Fig. 3. SPADE POINTS, ETC.

Common tracer. This is precisely like the end of a screw-driver, but it is on a piece of steel like a nail, Fig. 2. It is identical with the tracer used in repoussé brass work. Many use it instead of the wheel.

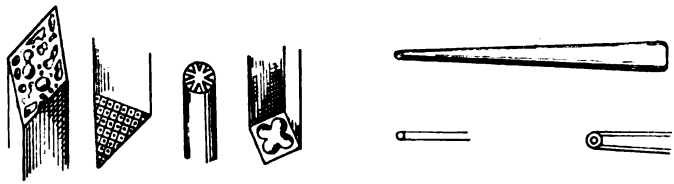
The spade-point. This resembles an eraser, but has a dull edge.

It is used for a tracer, moulder, etc. An ivory or horn paper-knife with one end cut to a point is also useful for the same purpose.

Fig. 4. AWL TRACER.

The awl-tracer. This is a fine point curved, used for tracing lines in cut leather work.

Matts, stamps or indenters. These are very important. They are pieces of iron or steel like very large nails or spikes. The ends are cut into many forms to produce impressions. No. 1 is half an inch in breadth, and is in hollows of different sizes, so



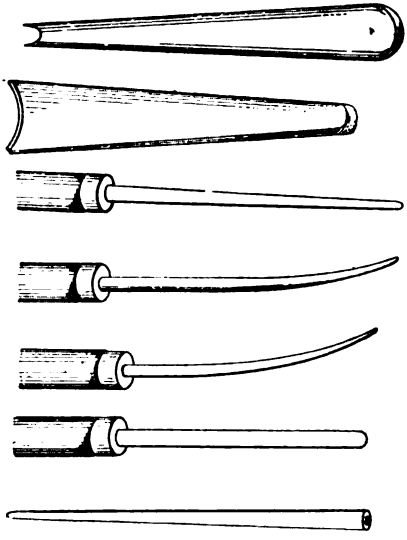
No. 1. No. 2. No. 3. No. 4.

Fig. 5. MATTS OR STAMPS.

as to produce the irregular granulated appearance of Turkey morocco. No. 2 is cross-hatched like an office seal. A fine round point like an ∘ is used in Vienna for delicate work in hard leather. Most pupils will be able to make stamps for themselves with bits of nail rod, or even the ends of large nails filed across. As I have said, a good stamp, which will corrugate a ground perfectly well, can be cut with a penknife on the end of a bit of wood.

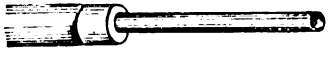
Moulders. These are tools of differently shaped points used to mould, indent, or press the softened leather into shape, as, for

instance, to round and turn the leaves of flowers. With these may be included the cup and ball-tools of repoussé work, the former of which are round rods having their centres hollowed out like a cup, so that when pressed on the leather they leave a round projecting hemisphere, while the latter make a similar depression or hole.



Moulders.

Ball Tool.



Cup Tool.

Fig. 6. MOULDERS, ETC.

Border tools are a variety of stamps. They make stamped patterns, such as rosettes, stars, diamonds, or crosses, which are very effective as lines of ornament. The same tools are also used to stamp or over-ground leather already matted. They are made in many forms and sizes, a few of which are indicated on page 17 in the Manual on Wood-carving.

The mallet. This is specially used for large work—stamping, *i.e.* matting or corrugating backgrounds and heavy outlining. In Italy a piece of rather heavy wood six or eight inches in length, one inch or more broad at the heavy end, is often used for a mallet or hammer.

Bookbinders have patterns of flowers and all kinds of ornaments on revolving cylinders, set in handles. These can be used for borders of any length.

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The student will need a *board*, made in three pieces, because it must be wet, yet must not warp. For those who can afford it a slab of marble or of smooth slate is preferable to this, and it may often be obtained cheaply at a stonecutter's. A great variety of tools are used in different countries for leather work, but those which I have described are all that are absolutely necessary. In addition to these, however, several awls, flat or pointed, a brass ruler, or, for want of it, a wooden one, blotting paper and thin water-proof stuff or American oilcloth will all be found useful; also compasses, a towel or two, scissors, and a very fine-bladed, pointed penknife. Also many tacks or drawing-pins; paper and drawing materials will also be required.

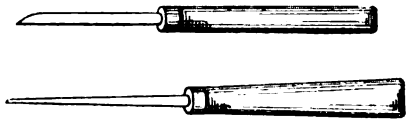

Fig. 7. KNIVES.

The leather to be used is of many kinds. It may be, according to the work undertaken, of any hardness or thickness, but for what is here to be first taken in hand, that is, *sheet* leather work, for outlining and stamping, which is easiest for beginners, what is called basil or russet, of the natural light brown colour, is employed. Better and more expensive are sheets of leather corresponding to the "uppers" of shoes. For cutting and moulding we employ fine saddle-leather. In all German cities very fine and hard leather is made and sold expressly for the most delicate artistic work.

Where the surface is to be specially worked or moulded into ornaments, pointed tools of various patterns are used. These depend to a certain degree on the pattern, and may be greatly varied. But for most purposes a very few tools will at first suffice. In this, as in all arts, the student who makes a good beginning with a few tools, will always find out what to get or use when he can do something simple perfectly well. It is

almost the rule, especially in Germany and Austria, for leather-workers to confine themselves to the most elaborate and artistic fine work of a small description, though, in fact, that which is of a larger kind, and far more easily made, is often the more profitable and useful.

Many special tools for moulding are made in Germany, and though most that are necessary can be obtained in London without difficulty, the following remarks will be useful. Any gouge such as is used by carpenters or wood-carvers, if dulled so as not to cut the leather, may be used for curves. I have taken a steel pen *reversed* on its upper end to make scales on a fish, or the short feathers in a bird's wing, etc. With a little ingenuity it will be found easy to devise and make tools for working leather into all forms or conditions requisite to produce beautiful results.

To execute good work, the pupil must absolutely endeavour to produce something *original*, and not be satisfied to do just what others do. He must *think*, and this thinking must be extended to making, or having made, special tools for special work. What I have shown will enable him to do a great deal, but unless he exercises his inventive faculties he will never produce much of real value in any decorative art whatever.

Leather work, as taught in all the manuals which I have met with, is limited, firstly, in the older works, to making chiefly artificial flowers and leaves, with special view to imitating carved wood, and in the more recent publications, to what was anciently known as *cuir-bouilli* or stamped work, though even in this not a single modern authority teaches what was the great Italian speciality of the fourteenth century, that is, the working and carving in *raw hide*, which produced work of intense hardness, such as now sells for incredibly high prices because the art is supposed to be lost. Beyond these is the very beautiful art, but little practised, of picture making, which opens a wide field, it

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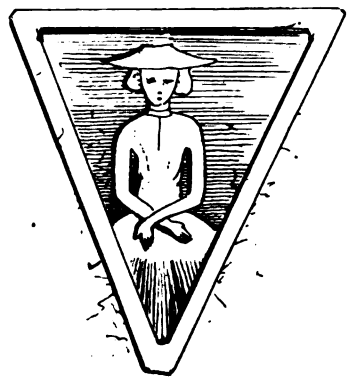
not being as yet generally known that any drawing or etching, however delicate, which can be executed on paper may be produced with a point as well as by cutting on hard leather. This combined with stamping, forms, not an imitative, but an original art of great importance. All of these methods of work will with other novel, or at least little known processes, be described in this work.

Iron or steel tools, even when kept burnished, are apt to discolour leather. Therefore, when you can, use them made of agate, ivory, horn, brass, or wood. Much work can be done with the agate points and edged burnishers sold for gilders, etc.

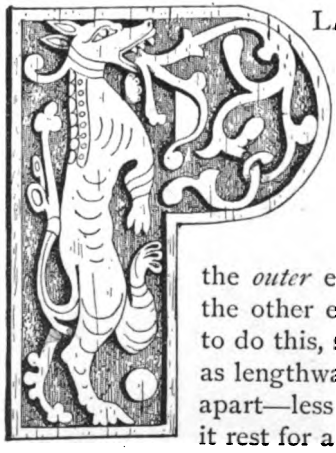
The most needful tools for leather work may be obtained of Holtzapffel and Co., 64, Charing Cross, London. Leather is sold by Messrs. T. C. Nicholson and Sons, 104, Bethnal Green Road, N.E. The reader will find in the Handbooks of Design and of Wood Carving[1] many patterns suitable for leather.

[1] Published by Whittaker and Co., 2, White Hart Street, London, E.C.



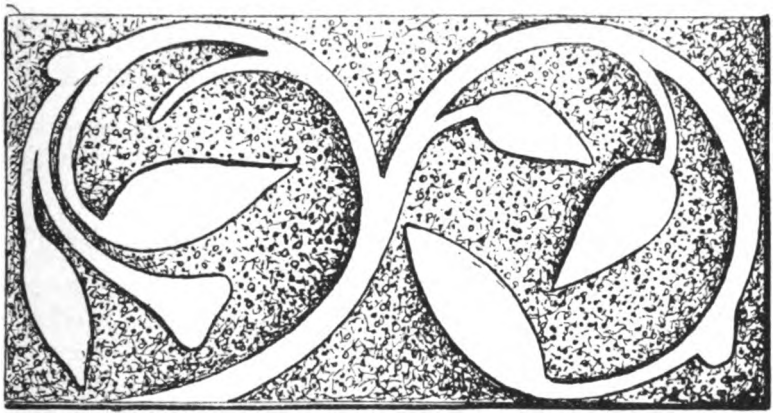
LESSON I.

OUTLINING WITH TRACER OR WHEEL, AND INDENTING OR GROUNDING.



PLACE a piece of leather on a board made in three pieces (that is, one large centre with two ends), the leather being large enough to lap over the ends. Steep it for a few minutes in water; a mere dipping will suffice if it be thin; and fasten one end with the pins or tacks to the *outer* edge. Draw it tight, and then fasten the other end and sides. Some care is required to do this, so as to draw it out sideways as well as lengthways. Let the pins be about one inch apart—less it may be, but never more. Then let it rest for a few hours.

If you use a stone slab or large sheet of thick glass the leather will adhere well enough for ordinary work by mere wetting. Thick leather may be worked without fastening on a



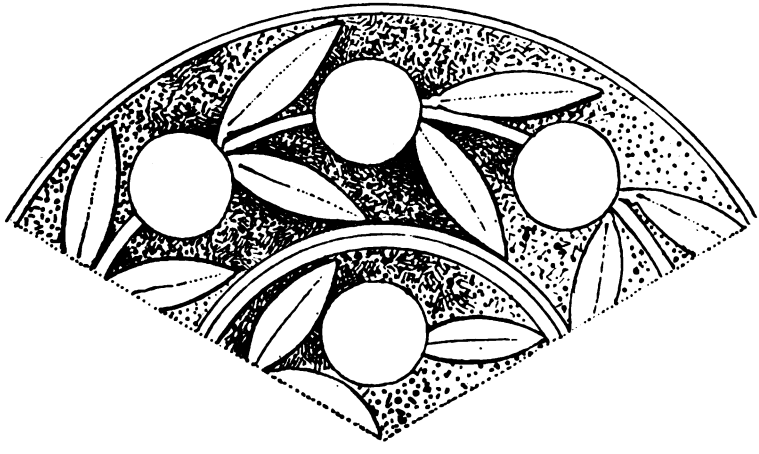


Fig. 8. Specimens of Elementary Work. Simple Exercises in Outlining and Grounding.

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board or a table; but the thinner it is, the greater is the necessity for holding it firmly while working. This may be done where the stone or glass is employed by using clamps, screw or other kinds, at the edges. The only advantage of the wood over stone is that it permits a somewhat deeper impression to be made in the leather.

Draw the pattern on paper; lay it on the leather, and with the prick-wheel draw it on the lines so as to press through the paper into the leather, but not so hard as to penetrate it. All that is required is that a visible line of dots be made. Take off the paper, and with a soft black-lead pencil, or preferably a very black crayon pencil, or camel's-hair pencil, and Indian ink or brown, draw the pattern on the leather, following the dot-lines. If they are quite visible and clear, they may be outlined, however, at once with the wheel No. 2, or tracer, or a pointed ivory paper-knife, or the spade-tool. Take care not to scratch or cut the leather. Do this rather lightly, so as to merely secure a permanent outline.

Another method is to lay the paper, first wetted, on the leather, and directly trace the pattern either with a bone point or tracer. But I very much prefer using the prick or dot-wheel, as it gives a line which does not so readily pull out of or disappear from the leather. Observe that the softer and spongier the leather, the more difficult will it be to make marks remain. Always damp the leather at least twenty-four hours before using it—should it dry, sponge it.

Then with the wheel No. 2, or tracer, go over the whole with perfect care, pressing deeply. This may be done with or without a hammer. Do not just stamp the tracer, then remove it, and then stamp again, but learn to *run*, or pass, or slide the tracer along, as in brass work, while pressing or hammering. It is best to do this at first with the wheel. After a while the pupil may use the hand tracer.

When the outline is thus secured, take a matt or stamp, and indent with it all the ground close up to the outline. This will require some practice. Do not stamp the same place over and over again, or a blurred bad ground will be the result. Stamp so that the shape of the tool may not once appear distinctly anywhere. If the outline disappear, as will be the case if the leather is too soft or too wet, renew it with the wheel or tracer. Should the work become too dry while working, have always a sponge and a saucerful of water at hand, and moisten it very sparingly. A very little wetting will suffice.

When all is done, let the work dry for two days, and if while thus drying it seems to be losing its distinctness, touch it up again without moistening it too much.

If the leather be too dry or hard, it will not take impressions or form; if it be too soft, it will presently lose some of the sharpness of outline. It is therefore important to work on it while it is in good state to receive and retain. This is, however, a very easy matter. When it has been once fairly well wet through, and then allowed to dry for a day, it will be in good condition; and when it seems to be growing too hard a very little moistening with a sponge will revive it, or make it quite right. No exact directions can be given, owing to the variety of thickness and hardness in leathers.

If it is desirable to get to work on a piece of leather as soon as possible after it has been dipped, lay it on the board and wrap it in a dry towel, or press the towel on it to draw out the superfluous moisture.

For large leather work, such as backs of chairs or panels of doors, where general effect is more aimed at than minute finish, the smooth wheel is in practised hands more expeditious than the tracer. It will often happen that in the largest patterns there are little corners into which the wheel will not go, however small it be. In such a case the tracer or dull point must be used.

The firmer and harder the leather, the clearer and more durable will be the impressions made. Spongy and soft, or thin leather may have "body" given to it by being soaked in water strongly infused with alum, and then dried.

What is here described is the easiest or most elementary work in leather. But it should be thoroughly mastered and practised

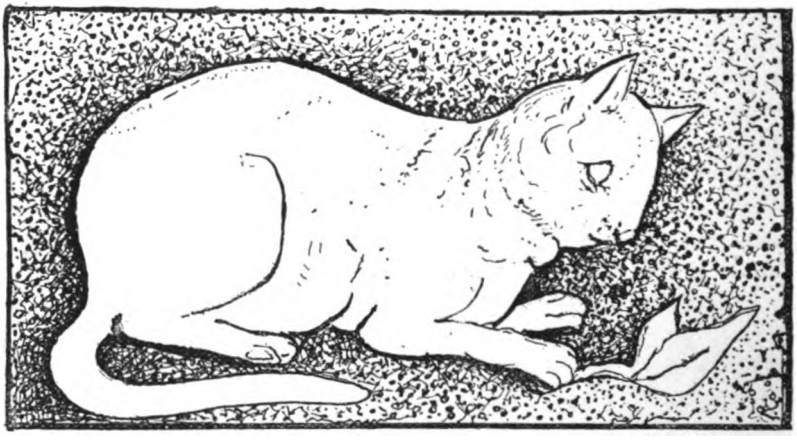


Fig. 9. EASY EXERCISE.

before going further. And it may be applied to a great deal of large and very striking decorative work for screens, doors, etc. It can be executed very rapidly with a little practice. Observe that any kinds of patterns for any superficial work may be applied to it.

Before going further let it be carefully observed, that to become a really thorough and artistic leather-worker, it is of the *utmost* importance that the pupil thoroughly master the first stages. In nineteen cases out of twenty, all students of the minor arts could make twice the progress which they usually do,

if they would thoroughly practise the rudiments and devote ten times as much time to them as is usual. Unfortunately the desire to produce something to show or sell impels them to hurry into difficult work, when, in fact, if they would attend to *design* they would produce saleable and artistic results with very little labour, if it were *well* done.

The first step in leather work is to learn to run the lines clearly, cleanly, sufficiently deeply, where it is required, either with wheel or tracer or awl-point, to know how and when to touch them up and renew them, and make them effective. That is to say, the pupil should practise on waste leather until he can draw, or, as one may say, press or "etch" lines, so as to even execute pictures with them. It seems a simple thing to trace a line, but a great deal of practice is needed to do it thoroughly well.

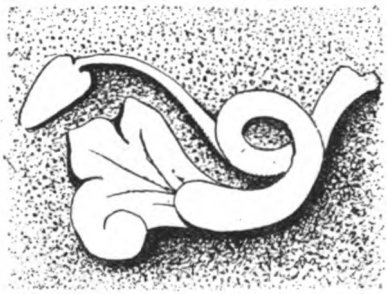
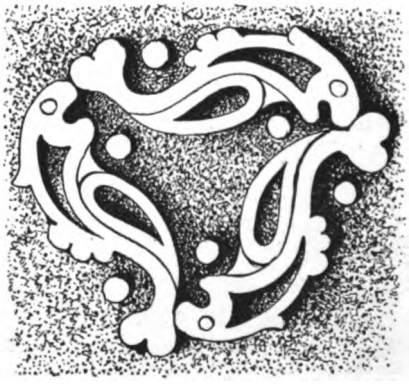


Fig. 10. EXERCISE IN CURVED PATTERN.

After a little working in embossing sheet leather with wheel or tracer and stamps, the beginner will find it sometimes very difficult to get the wheel into corners, or to outline with it very small "flowers" or ornaments. Then he must work with a more or less narrow tracer, or a point, as before stated ; or with an awl. Dull "gouges," or those whose edges will mark without cutting, are very useful for flowers, leaves, and curves.

There are various ingenious ways of bringing out relief in outline. The chief is, of course, to mark the outline deeply and bring the edge of the matt or the stamp, be it large or small, well down into the line. Also to slope or incline the leather

down, bevelling it just as in wood-carving or repoussé, and then matting it. And as in these arts great care must be exercised to hold the punch or matt perpendicular, so as not to mark on one side; to change its position, so as to avoid uniform check-work; to press it down when striking, so as to make it give as much mark as possible with one blow, because two will make a blur. A great deal depends on the quality, hardness, and *body* of the leather used. If it has been well tempered or damped, and then properly dried, the working will be all the easier.



LESSON II.

Cut Leather Work.

OUTLINING. RELIEF BY UNDER-CUTTING AND STUFFING.

EADERS will by this time have observed that when a line is run with a wheel or tracer it frequently loses its distinctness, or may, if the leather be soft and wet, disappear entirely. But if we take a piece of fine hard saddle-leather, and with the point of a penknife cut a very fine line just entering the surface, little more than a mere scratch, and then *run* the wheel or a tracer along in the line, it will remain as a very permanent groove.

This is applicable to all lines in any kind of work, and is a great aid in many cases. But it is particularly applicable to

extremely delicate and minute patterns. This is especially the case as regards lines and picture-making in leather, since by means of it even an outline pen-drawing can be faithfully reproduced. That is to say, any line along which the point of a fine

Fig. 11. SPECIMEN OF AUSTRIAN CUT LEATHER WORK, DATE 1460.[1]

penknife can pass, and over which a tracer can go, and into which the point of a fine camel's-hair pencil can be drawn, may be executed in hard leather.

[1] Modern duplicates of the original from which the figure is taken are to be found in several European museums. The lines of shading are rather rudely cut with a penknife and coloured. The material is parchment, or leather resembling it.

Let the learner now take such a piece of leather and draw on it a line or outline figure. This may be done with a lead pencil.

Fig. 12. AUSTRIAN CUT LEATHER, FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

Then with the penknife let him cut all the lines slightly. When this is done, apply the *fine* tracer, which is like a bent awl or wire, and which may be made with a piece of knitting needle set in a handle. The ordinary tracer is too large for this work. All the

damping required for this work is a very sparing use of the sponge.

When the outlines or *in*-lines are completed and the work is quite dry, take a fine water-colour brush, and with care paint any colours you please into the lines. As they are protected in the groove from rubbing, they will last very well. There are in Saltzburg, and also in the Vienna Museum, folio volumes the covers of which are decorated with dragons and ornaments in cut leather, Fig. 11, while the ground is slightly matted or stamped. Anybody who can simply draw could execute these patterns perfectly, but these covers are regarded as so curious and beautiful that facsimiles of them are found in most European museums.

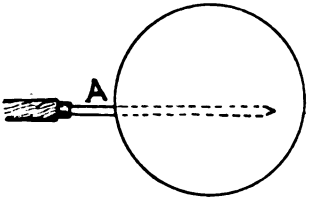
Fig. 13. CUT LEATHER IN LINES, MEDIÆVAL WORK.

There is a curious device by means of which the patterns of Vienna cut work are raised into relief. Let us suppose that we have in our work a ball, and wish to make of it a boss.

Take a very narrow sharp double-edged penknife, and slip it into the edge at A (see page 20), but so as to keep within the leather, that is, to split it. Work the blade about very carefully until it has

Fig. 14. Book Cover. Cut Outlines, Austrian Work, Fourteenth Century.

cut or split the leather beneath the whole circle. Then with the needle-like tool stuff in through the hole fine cottonwool, which may be mixed with gum to harden. When the circle is filled, the aperture A may be gummed up. It may be remarked that this stuffing, while it is often fit enough for certain work, is very much overdone by amateurs, who regard it as "so ingenious." Whenever it is possible, it is best to work the relief firm and hard, directly out of the leather. The stuffed bag is apt to tear; it is not durable, and durability is very important in leather-work.



Cut outlining is eminently well adapted to Gothic designs, parchment, especially of a very solid and firm kind, and books and albums. It is now unfortunately very generally degraded in Vienna to trashy subjects and vulgar designs, for which it is totally unfitted. Every person who can design or draw neatly with pen or pencil will find it a very elegant and remunerative art. It is particularly striking on vellum or very heavy parchment, which any tanner or manufacturer will make to order of any thickness. The lines may be filled in with brown.

It is worth mentioning in this connection, that if several thicknesses of paper be pasted together, and the outer one be of the best thick pure-linen drawing paper, and this be *rubbed* with a *very* light-coloured coat of white paint, into which just enough Naples yellow has been infused to give it an ivory tone, it can be cut and worked like parchment. When rubbed by hand a linen (not cotton) paper will become so much like parchment that the one may be mistaken for the other. I have seen Austrian work of this kind four hundred years old in perfect preservation, which was generally supposed to be parchment. If damped with a

very weak solution of sulphuric acid and water, paper becomes in fact precisely like parchment. A surface of drawing paper thus washed becomes quite changed in its texture and may be cut, traced, and treated like leather. This is very curious, and is as yet little known. It will of course require a few experiments to determine the quality of the paper and the strength of the acid. As a rule, with few exceptions, amateurs are very much averse to experimenting, their object being too often to make something at once instead of learning *how* to make it.

The reader who finds any difficulty as regards patterns for leather work is advised to carefully study the books mentioned on page 7, since all the designs are perfectly applicable to leather work. New effects are easily produced by varying and combining patterns, and also by taking the ornaments and portions of one and multiplying them. An entirely new design can generally be made by applying the ornaments of one pattern to the construction lines of another.

Fig. 15. CARVED PANEL IN THE NATIONAL MUSEUM, STOCKHOLM.

LESSON III.

WORKING UP IN RELIEF, OR MOULDING WITH TOOLS.

DOUBTLESS there are many who will think that the first lesson of this work should have been devoted to this subject, because it is at present very fashionable and most amateurs begin with it. Boxes of tools for the purpose containing patterns and a specimen of work are sold in Hamburg. But as it is really the most artistic and difficult branch of leather work, it might properly come last. If we study the leather work of early times, we cannot fail to perceive

that the processes came historically exactly in the order in which I have described them. He or she who would become a thoroughly good artist should begin always with the very easiest work conceivable and make the most of it. For want of this, we have much "fine" and elaborate cutting of pretty little things in wood, and vast numbers of blank surfaces in buildings without bold and easy work such as was common two centuries ago.

Moulding or "working in" with tools on slightly damped saddle-leather, or on the thick and firm leather specially made for the purpose, is an art which, like most, is very easily learned from seeing it done, and which is difficult to describe. It consists of working in the surface, with tools made for the purpose, of (for instance) flowers, leaves, figures, as one would carve or rather model them in bass-relievo or low relief. It may be done with or without the aid of cutting the outlines. Thus the reader can understand that if he takes a tool with a spoon-shaped end, for example, he can press into the softened leather, raise its surface here, depress it there, in short, model and form the objects at will. Hitherto the beginner has been told how to indent lines, depress the ground with stamps or matts, and to produce simple patterns. Now he must not only outline a rose, but must shape its leaves and round them in curves, in rising and falling relief. It is in all respects like modelling in clay or wax, or carving in wood; the only difference being that the material used is softened leather. It is, however, an art by itself, with a character of its own, and though apparently elaborate and difficult, it becomes easy in its simpler forms after a little experimenting. To those who understand drawing, and who have had a little practice in modelling in clay or wax, it presents no difficulties whatever. And after much practice and teaching of

Fig. 16. SPOON-SHAPED MOULDER.

the minor arts, I think that, on the whole, it produces the best results as regards effect, and is certainly the most profitable. I have in my mind a lady who has constantly more orders than she can execute for such modelled leather work in low relief, and makes perhaps a pound a day by it, yet I think that any person who can design and model a little, could work quite as well

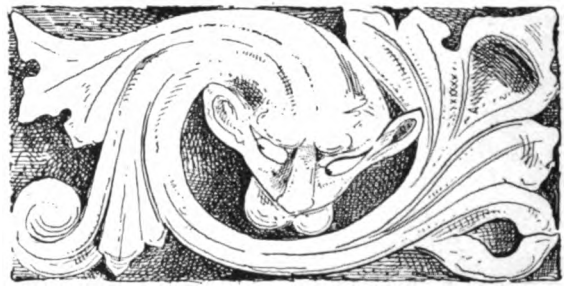


Fig. 17. SIMPLE PATTERN IN LOW RELIEF.

with six months practice. But I do not say that everybody or anybody can make a pound a day by repeating common patterns like any shop or machinery work, neither does every amateur know how to sell, or obtain customers—a fact much left out of sight. I have often been told of admirable professional workmen, who only earn from twenty to thirty shillings a week, but I have invariably found that they were either devoid of original taste as regarded design, or else worked for some employer who got the lion's share. But I confidently assert that the amateur or artist who, with even moderate practical skill, unites that capacity in design which can always be obtained by study, can always make a living by leather work or any other minor art.

If the student has carefully practised the previous lessons in outlining and matting, so as to *really* master them, he or she

will infallibly find very little or no difficulty in modelling in low relief. Taking anything for a model, of course best of all something in stamped leather—models for the purpose being obtain-

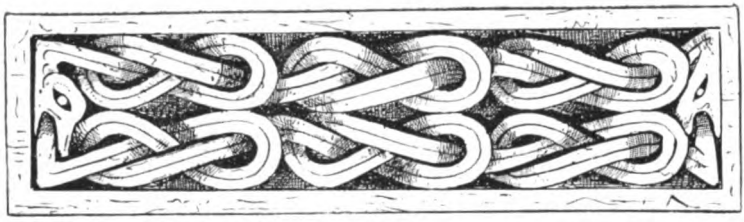
Fig. 18. LOW RELIEF, MATTED GROUND.

able for from two or three shillings upward—the imitation will be found easy, if not at the first effort, in a few days. But I have seen many first efforts which were not at all inferior to many specimens of old Italian work such as were sold in their time, and for which amateurs now pay high prices.

Those among my readers who live in Great Britain, can be instructed at the lowest current price in all branches of Leather-Work at the Home Arts and Industries Association in Albert

Fig. 19. BOX LID; OR, OMITTING THE CENTRE, A CIRCULAR FRAME.

Hall, London, and I believe that the secretary of this institution will inform applicants how or where they can obtain implements, models, etc., for this and all other minor arts. Very beautiful specimens of modelled leather work in relief have been exhibited by the pupils of the Association at their annual exhibitions in June. There is a class in leather work at this place once a week.



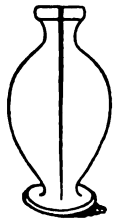
LESSON IV.

MOULDING, STAMPING AND WORKING IN CUIR-BOUILLI, OR SOFT LEATHER.

HEN leather has been soaked in water it becomes so soft that it may be boiled into a pulp, which can be easily moulded into any form, and yet when dry it becomes as hard as wood, especially if there be *alum* and salt in the water, and it be subjected to pressure. Raw hide, which can also be treated in this way, is quite as hard as any horn. Raw hide is really very thick parchment, both being simply the skin dried without "dressing."

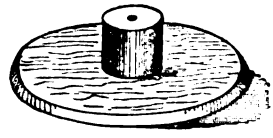
If the student can carve ever so little with a gouge he can execute incised or sunk carving. This is the easiest kind of wood carving, and can be learned in a few days. If he will cut a sunk pattern out of a deal or pine board, wet a piece of leather, or prepare leather pulp from scraps, and press it into this mould, he will have the pattern in relief. Or if he will take any kind of a mould in plaster of Paris and oil it well, he will find that with care he can take impressions in leather. The face of these must be of thin sheet leather, the filling or backing is best when made of leather waste or pulp, but paper and paste may be mixed with it, or used without it, as may tow, cotton-waste, wool, rags, etc. These waste materials and glue into which a *little* nitric acid has been infused, make a back as hard as wood.

If the student has, for example, a carved bread-plate or any flat object in large relief which he would like to reproduce in leather, and does not wish to make a plaster mould, he may more easily execute it, as follows:—Take soft paper and paste, and press the first layer especially with very great care on the object. Then apply more paper and then paste and so on, backing it if he pleases with the papier-maché itself, or glue and sawdust. When dry press the damp leather into this mould. To do this easily all that is required is to make it thick enough to bear pressure.



A smooth vase, cup, pitcher, plate, or any other object, especially one with a glazed surface without ornament, is very easily copied in leather. Wet the leather, spread it on the vase, trim it to fit, and let it dry. Then work it into ornament. In some cases it will be left on the jar. But to detach it, cut a single line down through the leather, and shell it off. Then bring the edges together, glue them to adhere, and paste a strip of very thin leather over the cut. This can generally be worked out of sight. In some cases the cut may

be stitched with strong thread or twine and then pasted over. It is generally advisable to make a base of two pieces of wood, which must be inserted in the leather after it is stripped off the mould and before it is finally worked. For it will readily be understood that the work cannot be executed with one thickness of thin leather. It requires a core or body to give it strength. This may be made, by soaking scraps of thin waste leather in warm water till perfectly soft and then pressing them, using a moderate quantity of gum or thin glue or flour paste, on the mould, till a second vase or cup, etc., is formed. When nearly dry, cover this with the leather which is to form the outside. Then work it in the manner described, slit it down, remove it from the mould, and then stitch or glue it together and hide the seam with a strip of leather, which is again worked over.



There are many water bottles, jars, plates, etc., made now which are simple, cheap and graceful, and which may be easily decorated in the manner described, or used as moulds.

The beginner is earnestly advised not to attempt to commence with pretty or valuable works. Let him use up some leather in careful experiments, for there is no art whatever in which an inexperienced person can hope to succeed at a first trial. It may, however, be said with perfect truth of leather work, that it requires much less experimenting than any other, and is of all the easiest to learn.

We can mould leather on a plate, and produce a facsimile without any cutting or pasting. How this can be decorated in different ways so as to form a beautiful ornament will be shown in the course of these lessons.

When the workman desires to produce a number of *duplicates*, as for instance a dozen chair backs, the easiest way to save

labour and time, is to have a pattern cut from thick cardboard, sheet metal, or fret-sawed from thin wood. Lay this on the board and the steeped leather on it. Work on the face, pressing it in and finishing with tracers and stamps, as has been already

Fig. 20. COPY OF A BOTTLE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY. BUDAPEST.

Fig. 21. STAMPED LEATHER CASE, CONTAINING THE LUCK OF EDEN HALL.

explained. In this way more than half the time usually required is saved, for the copying and transferring the pattern is by far the most tedious part of the whole work.

The cover of a book or album may be easily worked with the tracer or stamp, with or without cutting the lines. First cover the book, gluing or pasting the leather to the boards.

Carton-cuir is made by mixing waste leather scrap (book-binders' cuttings) which has been well boiled with waste paper. With a few days' practice—not by any means all at once—this, or papier-maché, may be moulded like clay into any form.

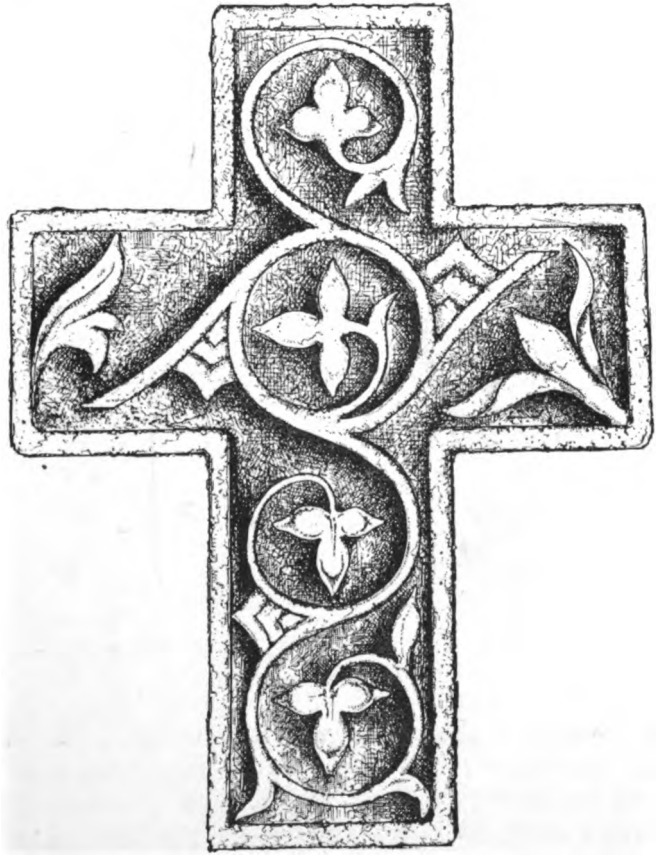
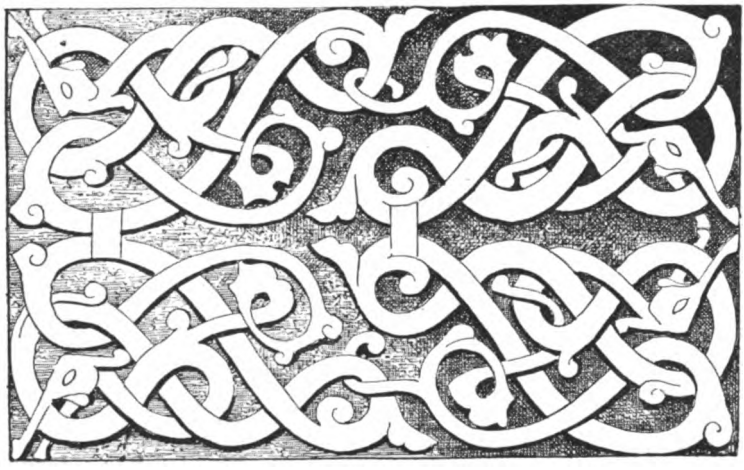


Fig. 22. CROSS OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY. FROM THE ACCADEMIA DELLE BELLE ARTI, VENICE.

In the fourteenth century very beautiful work was made by stamping boiled leather in moulds, or modelling it, and when hard cutting or working it like sheet leather. Raw hide thus

Fig. 23. STAMPED LEATHER CASE TO CONTAIN A BOOK. BRITISH MUSEUM.

treated, when cut and stamped, was very beautiful. There are two fine specimens of it in the British Museum. It is now extremely expensive, anything like a good specimen of such work, even a small *theca calami* or case for pen and ink, costing at least five pounds. It was always stained black.



LESSON V.

MODELLING IN CARDBOARD OR FRET-SAWED MOULDS. WORKING PARCHMENT, CUIR-BOUILLI, ETC.

Y working only as described in Lesson I., very beautiful results may be produced. This work is suitable to the backs and seats of chairs, cushions, picture-frames, covering boxes or chests, and in fact all kinds of surfaces, such as panels of doors, albums and walls. Another form of such simple or coarse work is produced as follows:—Cut a pattern out of cardboard or pasteboard; this may be of any thickness, or it may be fret-sawed from a thin board:

Fig. 24. MOULDED PANEL IN RELIEF. ANCIENT ITALIAN WORK.

soak the leather now till it is quite soft, put the pattern under it, and with a dry sponge or rag, or chamois skin, and with the fingers work it down as closely as possible, till it all fits. If

Fig. 25. GERMAN LEATHER WORK, SIXTEENTH CENTURY. COLOGNE. A BOX COVERED WITH RUDELY-STAMPED PATTERN.

the under side of the leather be covered with a coating of gum or glue, it will hold the leather better as it dries, but some practice is needed for this. Then when all is well adjusted, work the outline with a tracer or wheel and stamp the ground.

The highest relief may be made in this way, but it will be evident that if the leather be taken away from the relief, it will become dented if pressed. The author has a very beautiful shield of Florentine work, 300 years old, which has been "backed" with plaster of Paris. This is the worst filling which could be contrived. A very good one may be made by filling the cavities with boiled soft leather waste and glue, or paper, *i.e.*, newspapers, and flour-paste, first a coating of paste on the leather, then press in newspapers very carefully, and so on till it comes to a level. Soft rags or tow will do as well as paper. Then cover the back when dry with muslin or leather. When a shield or panel is to be covered it may be roughly carved, or the pattern formed on it in *gesso-painting*. This is painting in high relief with plaster of Paris and size or glue. It is done with a fine brush, and resembles carving. When dry, leather may be moulded on it, or over its face. Anything whatever which is in relief, such as a plaster cast, may be covered with *thin* leather, which with care can be worked to resemble it.

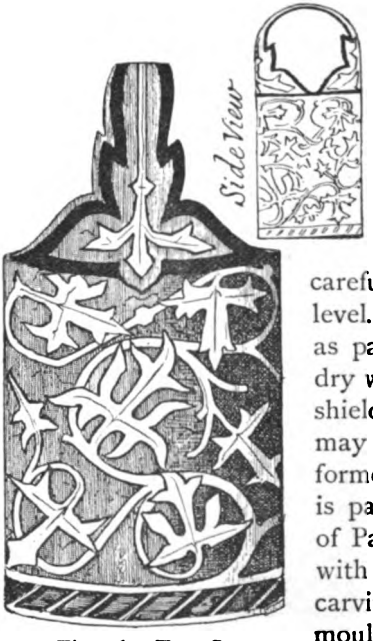


Fig. 26. TIN CAN COVERED WITH LEATHER.

The leather, as before mentioned, can be made harder by mixing a little alum with the water in which it is steeped.

Very beautiful work was made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in this way. Thus, an ordinary box was taken, ribbed strips nailed to its corners, so as to make compartments. Between

these rudely carved figures or patterns were introduced. Then the whole was covered with glue and on this thin damp leather was placed which was at once worked with tracers and stamps into finish. This was generally stained black. This can be best effected with two or three coats of dye, or even with the blackest writing ink. When it is perfectly dry, rub it over thoroughly with chamois skin and then oil it sparingly, see Fig. 25.

If we take thick glazed parchment, steep it in warm water till soft, and then work it into relief or stamp it, afterwards rubbing it by hand, and oiling it a little—the effect is very much like carved ivory. This can be greatly improved by very carefully working or painting into all the corners, dots, scratches, etc., a little brown paint. This is a beautiful kind of leather work. By means of it the most exquisite book or album covers are made.

This soft leather with patterns in any relief can be applied to any kind of surface and by means of it common or even worthless articles can be made valuable. It is applicable to glass vases, jars, plates, wooden bowls, old tin cans, cocoa-nuts, etc., and the effect is not trashy or counterfeit in the least if the work be good, Fig. 26, see also Fig. 59. It is a very easy matter to cut patterns out of cardboard. Where an extra high relief is wanted we get it by pasting on more cardboard or paper and rounding it with a sharp penknife and glasspaper. Glue or gum these on the plate or vase and apply the leather. For highly glazed surfaces mastic cement should be used.

A very great variety of flat wooden lattice work is now made in imitation of the Egyptian window-screens. A panel of this makes a very good mould on which to press soft damp leather, which when dry may be used to cover rectangular spaces.

It is a great advantage in leather work, that if the pattern is wrongly worked all can generally be made right again by

damping it, and smoothing it with an ivory paper-knife or burnisher. With care one can thus easily amend most errors. Even if the leather be cut through or utterly spoiled in any way, we can remedy it by pasting a piece of thin leather over it. The seam generally disappears under the stamping and tracing, especially if it be dyed black. And it may be here remarked that for ordinary coarse work we can use all leather rags, scraps and refuse, by steeping them in hot water, and gluing or pasting them together. If they are all one colour they can be worked into one surface, and when stamped will look very well. Book-binders' waste leather is sold very cheaply; and all kinds of colours and sizes, down to the least snippings, are available for the art.

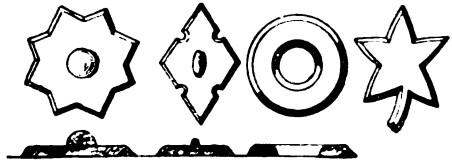


Fig. 27. PAPIER-MACHÉ CORES.

It should be distinctly understood that anyone who can draw, or copy, or trace a pattern, can make it into relief by executing it on thick cardboard and then cutting it out with a penknife. Cardboard is only paper made thick, and it is the same if one layer of paper be pasted on another.

Bosses are made in leather work by introducing semi-spherical button-moulds or nail heads, which may be had of all sizes, or any similar objects, under the sheet. They may also be made of papier-maché or cut out of cardboard. In this manner the greatest variety of the most beautiful relief may be obtained. Its permanence and excellence will depend on the quality of the leather used, the degree of skill in the work, and last but by no means least, in the glue or gum or paste employed, and in the perfect adhesion of the coat to the surface. Leather is not only a beautiful surface, but when it is hard and firm, and well applied, it is an admirable protector for all kinds of objects.

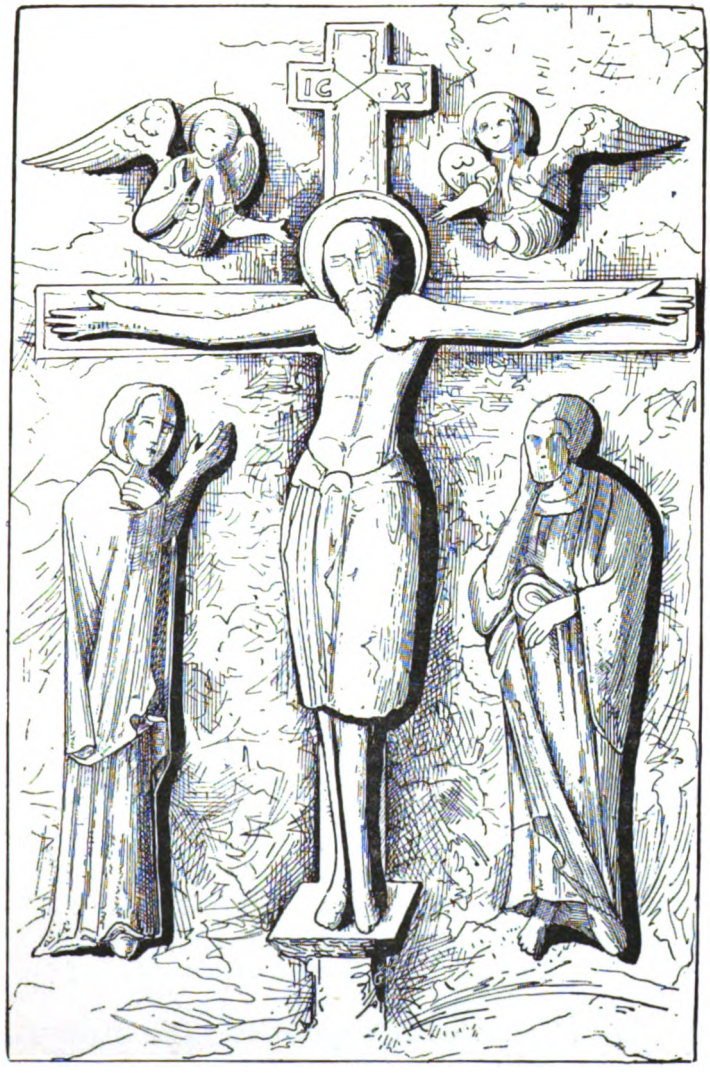


Fig. 28. CRUCIFIXION. TWELFTH CENTURY. BYZANTINE.
Thin leather over wood in high relief.

Relief backed with wood. I have very often been asked how to make bold relief in thin leather-work, and also how it should be "backed" to sustain the leather. Many use putty, or a special composition, and a mixture of fine leather scraps with glue answers very well But the best method is as follows, which I vouch for having tried with success:

I have in my possession a relief of the Crucifixion, size 8 inches by 5, over which is a triangular pediment or gable, of two additional inches. The figures are in very high relief. They have been carved from wood, and glued to the panel. The whole is covered with black *thin* leather of good quality. The reader may make it in this manner. Take a panel, which must be backed by strips of thin board, or better still, by one of the same size as the panel on which the work is applied. Be sure that the grain of the wood of one panel is placed cross-wise to that of the other, the object being to prevent warping or curving, which is sure to take place when the front panel is damped from the leather. Then draw the figures (or ornaments) on a panel and cut them out with a fret-saw. Round the edges with a file and sand paper, and if they are in *high* relief indicate the folds, etc., with a few touches with a gouge. Then take the sheet of leather, steep it in water until it is very soft, press it between two cloths, or in a towel, to extract as much moisture as possible, and let it dry for an hour. Then *without nailing* the edges to the outer edge of the panel, press the leather on the figures which have been glued to the panel. Before applying it, give the whole surface a good coating of glue or of strong gum to make it adhere. Should it "come through" and stain the leather, it is of no consequence. Use a point or tracer to make the sharp lines, features, etc., as in other modelling.

When finished, tack the overlapping sides to the edge. Then, when quite dry, stain the whole block with two or three coats of ink or stain. If there are any indistinct outlines, mark them in

before the whole is quite dry. Then rub when dry with great care with soft leather or with the fingers. If a thin rubbing of oil be now applied, the ink or dye will not come off. The stain should be allowed to dry between each application and also be well rubbed in.

Reversed moulds. I have explained how if we cut out a pattern from cardboard and lay it under a moist sheet of leather it can be worked into relief. Now if we take the cardboard sheet *out* of which a pattern has been cut, and lay the leather on it and press it into the part cut away, it will when dry and removed show the pattern in intaglio or sunk-relief. This is an extremely easy way to produce stamped work where duplicates are required. These moulds may be cut with a fret saw from thin wood; the edges will in most cases look better if they are rounded with glasspaper.

It is sometimes difficult even with glue to make the leather fit and hold exactly into an angle such as— In such case the corner or angle may be rounded with wax, putty, or any other cement, thus:

By thus rounding the angles or corners as well as the edges, moulds are very easily made, not only for leather, but also for papier-maché. It need hardly be observed that leather thus stamped in the mould may be finished up by hand, and that in this way much time may be saved, especially where many duplicates are required.

There is yet another way to work leather in this manner. The reader may have often seen sheets of zinc, iron or other metal, cut full of open-work patterns. These are used for many purposes and may be bought cheaply by the square foot. If we take a sheet of leather, soak it well, and press such a perforated metal sheet on it, the leather will press out in turn in relief through the openings. This relief can be increased by pressing on the back. These projections can be coloured by the very

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simple process of brushing or sponging dye all over them while they are in the metal. In this way sheets of leather with coloured patterns for walls may be easily made. The same process is applicable to thick papier-maché perforated.

Leather of a very good hard quality is extremely durable; I

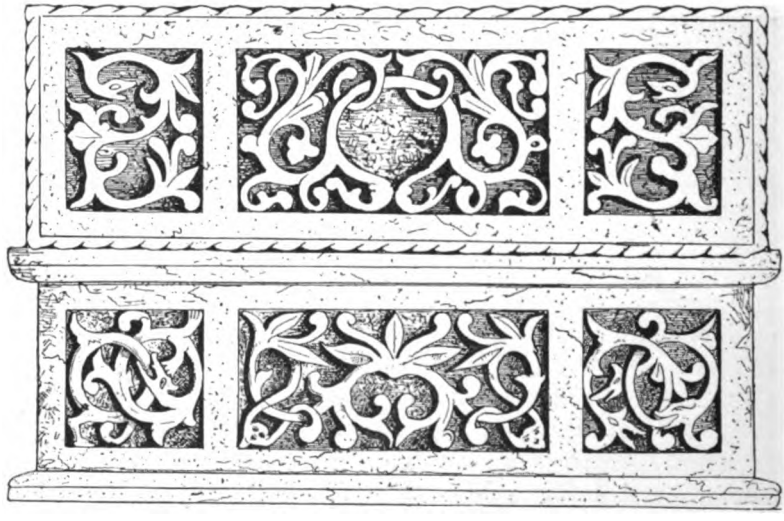

Fig. 29. BLOCK-STAMPED LEATHER BOX, FLORENTINE WORK, SIXTEENTH CENTURY, IN THE POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR. (The upper portion is the lid.)

have seen Roman shoes of open work, stamped in patterns and found in the Thames and elsewhere, which looked as if they were new.

The reader is aware that from the same skin of an animal there are produced two very different substances, such as wash-leather, or "chamois," and parchment, which latter is much like thin horn. A thick hide is in its hardness, when simply

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dried and salted, still more like horn, and from it objects can be made of very great durability, as I have already said. It can be softened in hot water, stamped and worked like tanned leather to receive fine impressions, and really surpasses any other substance whatever in not being liable to break or wear out.

The best Florentine or Italian cuir-bouilli work consisted of this raw hide moulded into objects, such, for instance, as cases to contain inkstand and pens, which were then stamped as in the ordinary processes, or when more elaborately ornamented, cut and traced. Cylindrical boxes to contain valuable documents were thus made. This cutting was like working in boxwood or carving horn. Stamping it was precisely like matting ordinary saddle leather. It differs from the latter only in being executed in a harder and thicker material. It was when finished invariably stained black. The frontispiece to this volume is an excellent specimen of moulded leather.

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LESSON VI.

SCORCHING AND PRESSING PATTERNS. OUTLINING BY SCORCHING. COLOURING AND PAINTING. IVORY WORK. GILDING. BRONZE-POWDERING.

READERS will have often observed in bookbinding that certain ornaments of a darker or deeper colour than the ground, are stamped on the natural, or russet brown leather. These are produced by taking a stamp and slightly heating it and pressing it on the surface. With a very little experimenting on waste pieces the pupil will find it easy to execute very beautiful work in this style with the wheel or tracer. It is not burning patterns, as they are executed on wood, with hot pokers, skewers, etc., but rather a very gentle scorching, for when even a moderate degree of heat is added *to pressure*, the result is a change of colour and that not on leather alone, but on most other soft substances or wood. This is a principle which is really very little known or applied

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in the arts compared with what it might be. And it is capable of easy and successful application on leather to a great deal of beautiful freehand work, as well as to mere stamping. It forms, indeed, almost an art by itself as regards its general applications.

The effect produced is not due entirely to heat. It is partly caused by pressure. If you will take the smooth-edged pattern wheel or tracer, or the edge of an agate burnisher, and run it backwards and forwards a few times over a piece of leather you will slightly change the colour, and this change will in time become perceptible. By pressure the molecules of leather have been forced together so as to change the substance. If you take a sheet of copper, burnished on one side like a mirror and hammer a pattern on the back, it may be quite invisible on the face. But let the sun shine on it, and let the reflection fall on a white wall, and the figures hammered on the back will be distinctly visible. The Chinese made their magic mirrors on this principle. The copper has been condensed where it was beaten, and this shows in a bright light.

If a firm fine piece of saddle leather be taken and the pattern drawn and then worked with hot tools, such as tracers, points, etc., the result will be brown on brown, and a little practice renders it possible to produce very rich and striking effects, especially in bold designs. Scorching is very effective when applied only to the outline of a pattern, the rest, such as the grounding and in-lines being marked in the usual way. When the leather is thin or poor and "pulls out" and the marks become dim, scorching is particularly advisable.

If the reader has a steady hand and a little practice he or she may begin by executing a cover for a small book, first making the design with Indian ink or Vandyke brown, and then going over it, with a tolerably firm pressure—not too hard—with a tracer or a dull, very well-polished point. He may rub up and

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Fig. 30. FINE CUT AND POINT WORK IN SADDLE LEATHER.

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down, but must beware of burning the leather or going too deeply.

It is to be observed that good common ink, and many other dyes or colours, when painted into the lines or on the patterns become indelible, or nearly so, when subjected to heat and pressure. This is of value where, as in the case of a book or album, the work will be frequently handled.

Very rich and beautiful effects are made by painting leather, and then varnishing it. The varnish used for this purpose is of the kind known as "flexible" which when applied and dried, suffers the leather to be bent without breaking it. It is such as is used in the manufacture of "patent leather." The best way to proceed where the work is intended to be of good quality, is to first varnish the design thinly, or to cover it with a coat of oil paint. When this is perfectly dry, if not quite smooth, polish it with the *finest* glass-paper, and by the hand; then apply the colour and when dry, varnish.

Another way to ornament leather which is extensively practised in Vienna is as follows: Prepare the ground with a coat of flexible varnish and then paint it over with a coat of white oil-paint, into which just enough Naples yellow has been mixed to give it an ivory-like tone. Work the pattern with tracers and stamps, *on the paint*, in the usual way. When dry take a fine hair-pencil and fill in the lines, dots, little scratches, etc., with Vandyke brown. When this is dry give the whole one or two coats of re-touching varnish. It will be understood that the addition of the Vandyke brown is intended to give the appearance of old ivory, or of old stamped parchment, in which age has, by the accumulation of dust, deeply shaded all the protected cavities. Analogous effects may be produced with other colours.

Or the student may work a piece of thick parchment in the usual way by steeping it in water, lining and stamping, and then shading the lines or cavities with Vandyke brown oil paint. No

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varnishing will be needed here. Some of the most beautiful results known in decorative art may be produced by these processes.

Gilding. The ordinary process of gilding consists of first preparing the ground. For illuminating on paper, this is done by simply painting the pattern or covering the surface with the white of an egg, applied with a brush. Before this is dry the gold leaf is laid on by the aid of a spatula or painter's knife of steel or horn, and a brush. This is a difficult process for a beginner. It is rendered much easier by using gold leaf laid on paper which has been waxed just enough to make the leaf adhere, but not to cause it to stick firmly, so that while it can be handled, cut to pieces, and applied, the paper can be at once removed. The best gold leaf thus prepared costs about 1*s.* 6*d.* per book of twenty-four leaves. For application to leather Japanese size, or some other fluid of the kind, of which many are made, is used. This is so durable that it will resist rain or exposure to the weather. The following detailed description of the process may be useful.

GILDING.[1]

A few attempts will master the process of gilding followed by professionals, that is, by carvers and gilders, and, as may often be watched in the streets, by the gilders of letters on sign-boards and over shop windows. This process gives the best results of all, and it only requires a little familiarity with the management of the gold-leaf and of the varnish called "gold-size" by which the gold-leaf is made to adhere. The ordinary book gold-leaf is used which, as well as the gold-size, may be obtained of any colourman.

The gold-size is painted all over the surface, or in places only as

[1] Kindly contributed by Mr. J. J. Holtzapffel.—C.G.L.

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required, with ordinary camel-hair or similar brushes, just in the same manner as any other paint which is mixed with varnish, not too plenteously to run into blots, nor yet too sparingly, the aim being to lay a thin even coat. This is then allowed to partially dry before the gold-leaf is applied to it, usually from two to three hours, but the precise time necessary is a matter only learnt by experience. It depends first on the thickness of the coat of gold-size—hence that should be thin—and next upon the state of the atmosphere, being less on a bright dry day than on a warm moist one. The simple test employed is from time to time to lightly touch the gold-size with the tip of a finger; when too fresh the finger readily carries some of the still liquid gold-size away with it, when a little drier much less, and at last hardly any, at which time also the finger tip is felt to adhere more decidedly than before. In this last condition the gold-size is technically called "tacky," and it is ready to receive the gold-leaf.

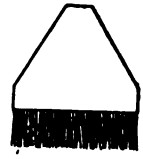

Fig. 31. BRUSH.

The gilder's tools are a long thin knife with a very straight and not too sharp an edge; a wide thin brush about three inches broad, formed of evenly placed camel's hair fixed between the edges of two triangular pieces of thick card or mill-board; a pad for cutting the gold-leaf; and a dabber, a small soft ball of cotton wool enclosed in a square of fine muslin, the edges of which are gathered together and tied to form a handle.

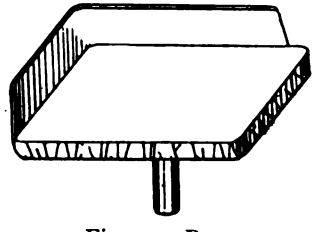

Fig. 32. PAD.

The pad is a piece of wood, half an inch thick by five or six inches square, evenly covered with a few thicknesses of flannel, and over these a piece of parchment, to give a moderately yielding surface, the edges of which coverings are brought round and

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nailed underneath the wood, and it is enclosed along one side and end by a wall of card or parchment, about three inches high, to keep out draught or currents of air, it is held horizontally in the left hand by a short round stick or handle fixed in the centre of its under surface.

The first and really only difficult operation is to lay a sheet of gold-leaf flat on the pad, which is done as follows:—The clean blade of the knife is passed completely under the leaf as it lies in the book, and the leaf is then lifted, with its two sides hanging down on either side of the flat blade, and is held about six inches over the pad. The pad is then gently raised and the knife as gently lowered until the two are about three inches apart; the downward movement of the knife is then suddenly accelerated, that the resistance of the air between it and the pad may cause both the hanging sides of the gold-leaf to float out horizontally, at the same instant the knife is withdrawn, in the direction of its length, and the centre of the leaf blown upon, and, if all this has been dexterously performed, the gold-leaf at once lies perfectly flat on the pad. If success does not follow the first attempt the gold-leaf may be lifted from the pad and practised with again and again until the knack has been acquired.

The blade of the gilder's knife is always a little longer than the width of the gold-leaf, and the latter is next cut into pieces or strips of suitable size by lightly pressing the edge of the knife upon it, so as to completely cover the width to be cut, and then traversing it across it. The pieces are transferred from the pad to the work, which lies horizontally before the operator, in one of two ways. They may be lifted by the knife and blown down upon it, after the manner already described; or, which is better, they may be transferred by the wide thin brush.

The gold-leaf is already somewhat loosened from the surface of the pad by the act of cutting, and this may be carried still further with the knife if judged insufficient; the brush in the

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right hand is then passed backwards and forwards a few times across the back of the left, or against the hair or beard, and immediately applied to the piece of gold-leaf, which then adheres to it, and is lifted by it and applied, and blown down upon the work.

Should an edge of the leaf anywhere not completely cover the gold-size, leave it untouched and apply a second piece so as to overlap this edge of the first, and blow both down together, and when finished the joint will be absolutely imperceptible. The whole of the gilt surface is lastly very gently pressed with the dabber and allowed several hours to dry thoroughly hard, after which any unattached gold-leaf or "rag" may be dusted off with a soft handkerchief.

The same general practice is followed with incised work or with ornament cut in relief, but the dabber is then replaced by a fairly large round camel-hair brush—which has been cut off square across and to about two-thirds of its original length with a pair of scissors—held vertically, so as to use its flat end with light pressure.

To make a line of gold, such as is seen in delicate line borders, draw a thin line of white of egg with a small brush, lay a strip of gold upon it and run the wheel over it. Then when dry, blow and brush away the outside "rag." To make a dotted line the size may be dispensed with. Use the dot-wheel for this purpose, slightly warming the leather first.

The ordinary cheap gold paints or bronze powders may be applied by simply painting them with a mixture of size, or mixing them with gum-water. There is a tolerably good gold powder made by mixing with gum, sold for *6d.* a paper, which is used like an ordinary water-colour paint, by simply putting it on a saucer and dipping the brush first in water and then applying it to the powder. But like all substitutes for pure gold it soon dulls when exposed to the air. The best gold leaf is made of

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very nearly pure gold, and does not change. Certain bronze powders are also quite durable.

Bronze powder colouring within proper limits affords beautiful decoration, and it was once extensively applied to leather hangings for walls. But used extravagantly—as it was two centuries ago—it becomes very tawdry and harsh. The effect of vines with grapes, life size, executed in green and purple bronzes is anything but refined or artistic. But in purely conventional patterns, such as borders, or in arabesques where only one or two colours are employed, the result is often striking and admirable.

Heating not only colours leather but makes impressions more decided or permanent. A great variety of stamps, or "tools," which are used for this purpose by bookbinders can be purchased, and the use of these in combination forms, in fact, a separate style in leather work.

But fine effects can also be produced by such burning either with the small jet of flame in an apparatus made for the purpose or by heating the tracer in a gas flame or chafing dish of any kind. Beginners are apt to overdo heating or scorching, as it seems to be so effective yet so easy. For a great deal of work the same effect may be produced by indenting, with or without cutting the lines, and painting the brown with a dye, or water-colour, and then tracing it smooth "over."

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LESSON VII.

MOSAIC, OR APPLIQUÉ WORK. CUT APPLIQUÉ PAINTED.

UNDER the name mosaic is known a kind of leather-work which is more properly called appliqué or applied work. It is very effective even when coarse, but to execute it neatly requires care. It consists of patterns cut out of thin leather of one or more colours, pasted, glued or gummed on a surface of another colour. Thus a black pattern may be cut out and applied to a sheet of brown leather or to a plain wooden panel.

Great care must be taken not to apply too much paste. Lay the pattern with its face on blotting-paper and spread the *adhesive* with a flat brush, and see that none gets on the coloured surface. Then turning it apply it to the ground. If it settles down well let it be for a time, and when almost dry, gently press clean dry blotting-paper on it, taking care not to squeeze any paste out on the ground. Should, after all, any gaps appear on

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the edge where it does not stick, then with the point of a fine camel's hair pencil or brush introduce a little more paste.

With all care the edges will probably be still unsightly. This can be remedied by simply running the wheel or tracer along

Fig. 33. OLD NORSE PATTERN IN HIGH RELIEF—STOCKHOLM MUSEUM.

them, which will press the edge down so as to take away the appearance of being a different piece. If there be no objection to an outline, the wheel or tracer may be heated so as to make a dark line. It is best of all, however, that this be in gold.

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Picture-picces of remarkable elegance for albums are thus produced.

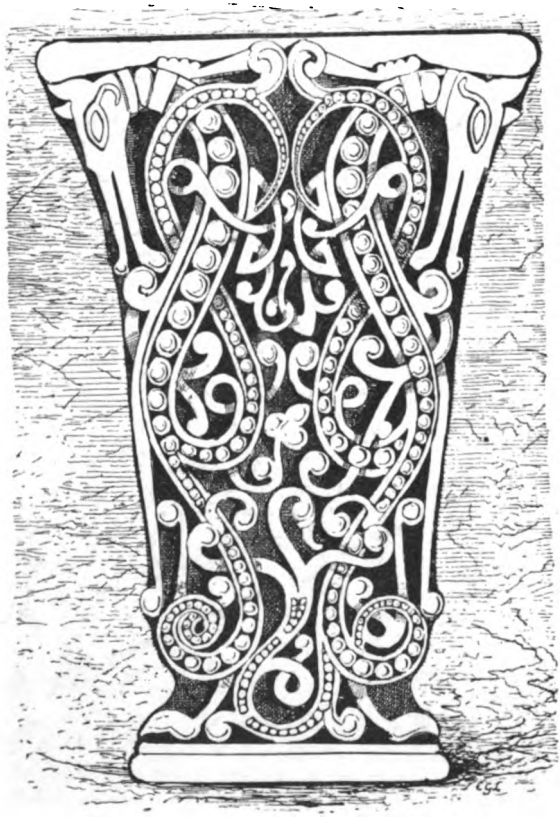

Fig. 34. VASE ORNAMENT, LEATHER ON WOOD—OLD NORSE.

Monochrome, i.e., single or one colour, is the term applied to patterns or pictures all of one hue, without shading. Much of the illumination of the middle ages, which is singularly striking

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Fig. 35. LEATHER APPLIED ON WOOD—OLD ITALIAN PATTERN.

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and also elegant, was, like most Egyptian painting, in monochrome. Patterns cut from coloured leather and applied to a surface of the same colour are necessarily so.

Fig. 36. CUT AND COLOURED WORK IN MONOCHROME. MUSEUM, FRANKFORT-ON-MAIN.

By pasting first one or more thicknesses of paper, leather, or muslin, cut out to exactly match the pattern on the ground, and finally applying the leather over this, a relief may be made of any

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thickness desirable. This is quite as good as regards effect as under-cutting and stuffing and it is much easier.

Another way to produce relief is to cut the pattern of the part to be raised, out of thick, *i.e.*, saddle or sole, leather, glue it on the ground, colour, glaze and border it.

This leads us to a very curious kind of work but little practised, yet which is quite effective. As appliqué or mosaic consists only of pieces of coloured and glazed leather applied with adhesives, we can, of course, produce exactly the same effect by colouring the leather or painting it in monochrome. This is done with dyes, which may be obtained of every chemist. These require to be painted on more than once, letting the colour dry at intervals. Then run the edge with wheel or tracer and paint it black or brown and wheel again, or else scorch or gild it.

In this way we can paint our pattern, and when the outline is made in the manner described, and the ground stamped the whole has quite the same effect as appliqué work. The glazing in the colour is produced according to the lustre required by rubbing with a burnisher, applying the white of eggs or different grades of varnishes.

Of this work, as indeed of all kinds, it may be said that it may be to the last degree trashy, or else nobly artistic, according to the skill and taste bestowed on it. One of the greatest and best known artists in England once expressed to me the opinion that owing to the tremendous production by machinery of cheap decorative art work, that which is made by hand must necessarily be confined to a comparatively few amateurs or artists who love the work for its own sake. But I believe that if these amateurs would pay proper attention to design, and think more of original invention, they would keep continually in advance of the machines. For the workman who is a clever designer can give a new design with every work. And it is very certain that the mere machine-duplicate of a work, which is spread by thou-

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Fig. 37. PANEL IN CUT AND APPLIQUÉ WORK—ITALIAN XIV. CENTURY.

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sands, is every day becoming less and less popular among people who have any true culture.

It is very certain, even now, that any person who can make a book-cover or album, the backs or seats of chairs, cushions, panels, brass, etc., in stamped, cut, or appliqué leather work can sell them for a remunerative price, if they are of an original and striking design. But to do this the workman must devote a part of his or her time to learning design, and not give it wholly, as most do, to elaborating the designs of others—most of which are of unknown antiquity, and indescribably common-place.

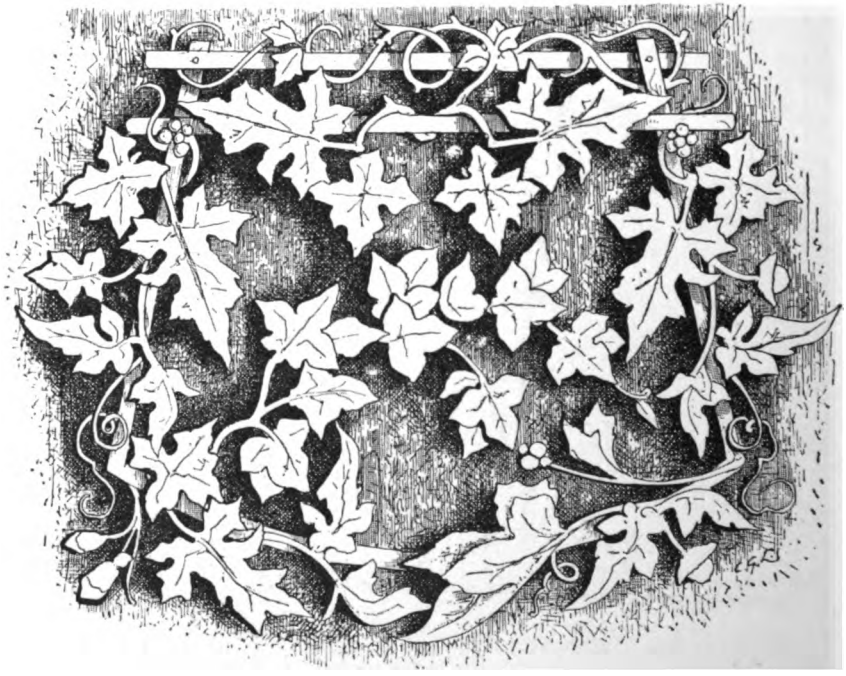

Fig. 38. SEAT FOR A CHAIR.

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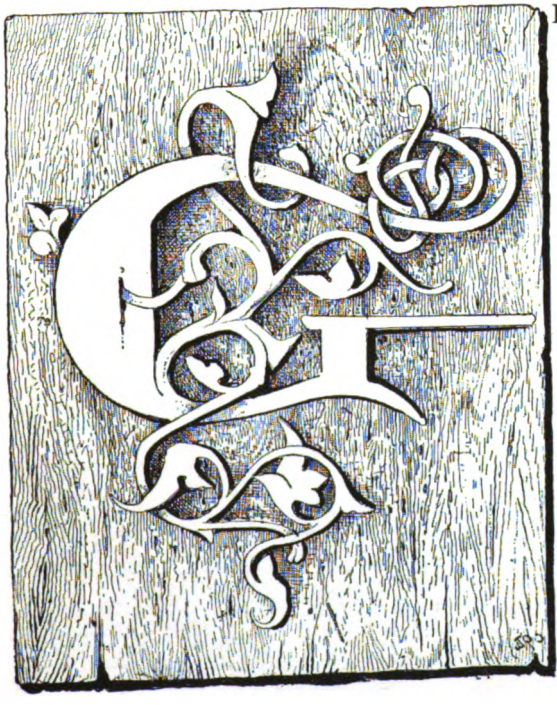
LESSON VIII.

FLOWER, LEAF AND FRUIT LEATHER WORK.



GREATER attention was formerly given to what is sometimes called Sheet Leather work,[1] than to what are really the more artistic branches of the art. It consists of imitating flowers, leaves, and fruit, by cutting out the petals or foliage from sheets of skiver (split sheep skin or "basil" a thicker russet or plain leather) moistening them with alum-water or salt-water, marking them, while damp, with a bodkin, bending them into

[1] See "The Minor Arts" (Macmillan), p. 35.

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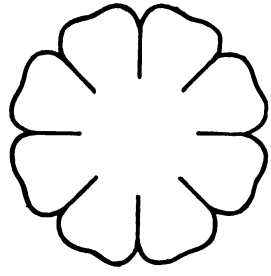
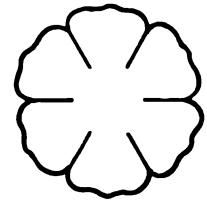
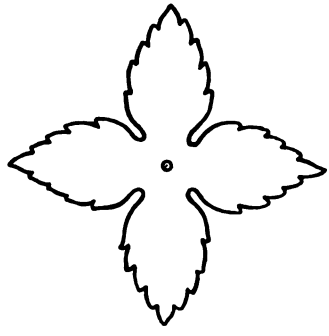
shape, and then mounting them on flexible wire stems, wrapped about with thin gummed leather. It is a very easy art and by means of it ornaments resembling carved wood are very rapidly manufactured.

The processes of cutting out leaves to make flowers are the





same as those followed in making them from paper. Thus to form a rose we cut out a scolloped circle, and then a smaller one, which is placed on the first.



The outer or green leaves of the calyx are in like manner cut from a third disc of leather.

A wire is then taken, to one end of which is fastened a bit of leather to represent the interior of a rose, and the other end is passed through the holes and then wrapped. If the stems are small, or if it be desirable to imitate vine tendrils, narrow strips of leather, like shoe-strings, damped and rolled, are sufficient.

The indentations or projections of oak or ivy leaves are made by pressing and shaping with the fingers, aided as occasion may require by the bowl or handle

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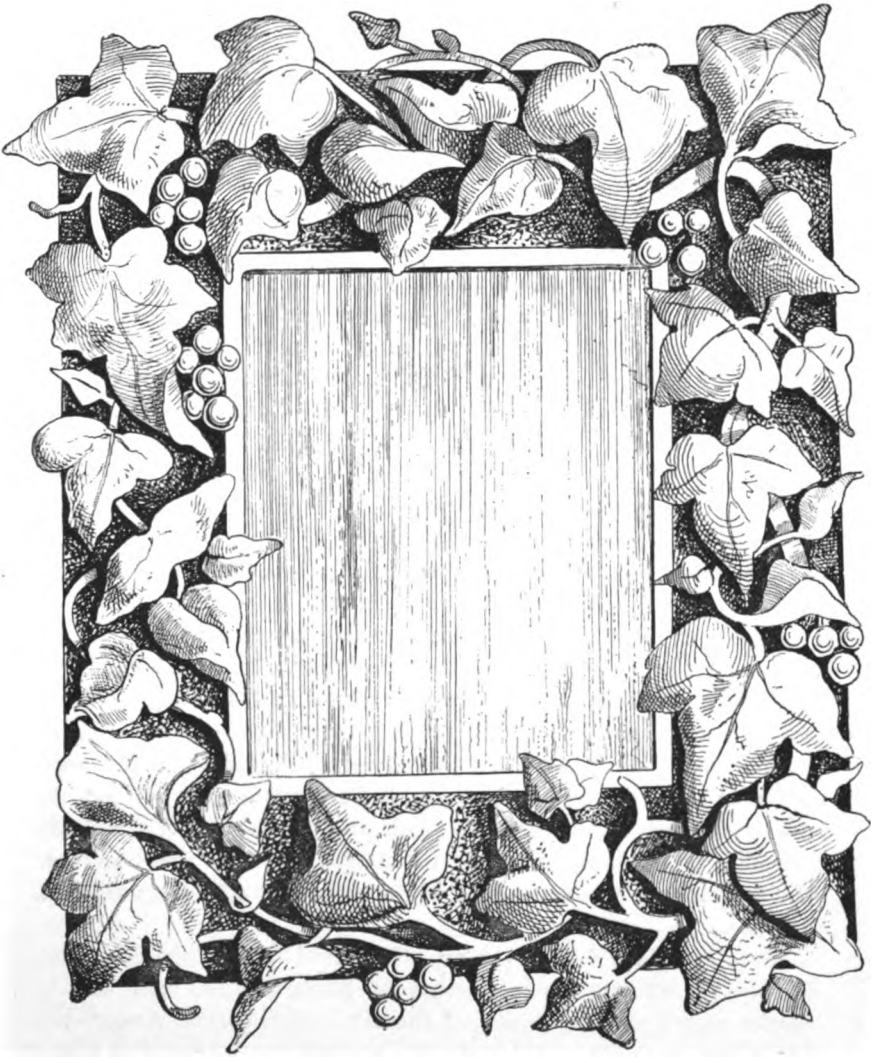

Fig. 39. FRAME. THE LEAVES OF SHEET LEATHER MOULDED.

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of a spoon, or a ball, or tools such as are used for modelling in clay.

Grapes, or ivy buds, are imitated by enclosing marbles, or large shot in tight leather bags and tying them in a bunch. Oranges, pears, or any fruit of the kind are formed in leather by taking either balls, such as are used for play, or made of wood or ivory or papier-maché as a *core*. For acorns, real acorns, are used, being covered with leather.

Flowers, however accurately imitated in leather, seldom produce a good effect, the reason being that while the extreme thinness and lightness of the fabric brings the likeness nearer to "nature," the colour of the leather detracts from it, so that they are more suggestive of some kind of dead and discoloured vegetation than flowers. This is not the case with imitations which are intentionally conventional. Nor does it apply so much to leaves, which are often brown and generally uniform in colour. When made of thick leather, well hardened, leaves may form very elegant ornaments for frames and brackets.

There are many objects, such as shells or nuts, which may be made on the articles themselves, and introduced among leaves and flowers. They are, of course, covered with leather, which is secured with paste or gum.

When the leaves or flowers are dry they should be coated once or twice with thin parchment size, to be applied with a brush. If desirable, varnish of different kinds may be used. When great rapidity of work is desirable, or many duplicates are required, the leaves may be marked out by a pattern made of cardboard or tin.

Until within a few years no other kind of leather work was known to amateurs, except this of flowers, fruit, and leaves. Books were published teaching the art, and the reader may still find many specimens of it in "Ladies' Repositories" and at fancy fairs. The chief objection to it is its very trifling nature, for it is

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applicable to very little that is really useful, unless it be frames for pictures or mirrors. It is not, like stamped work, adapted to cover furniture or books, or door panels, or caskets. And it gathers dust to such a degree that it is objectionable, and all the more so because by frequent dusting it is easily broken.

Fig. 40. STAMPED LEATHER VASE.

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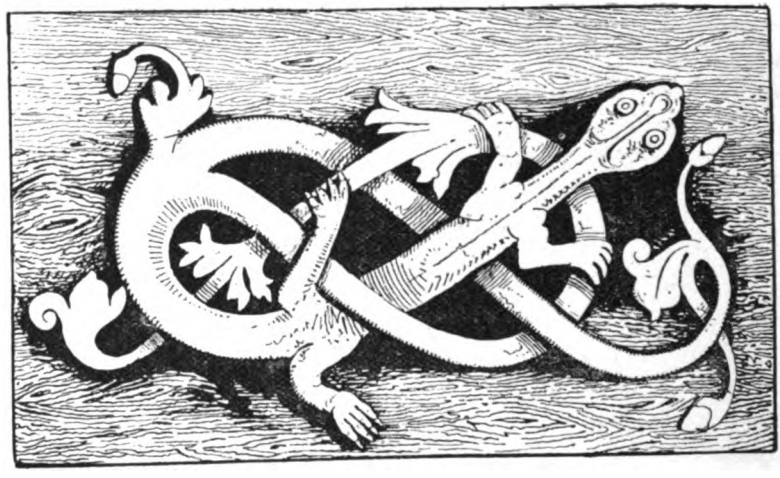

Fig. 41. AMULET AGAINST SORCERY.

LESSON IX.

IMITATION OF NATURAL OBJECTS "IN THE ROUND" IN LEATHER.

THE reader has learned from the last chapter that fruit, acorns, etc., are imitated in leather, or covered with it. But there is a further step in this branch of the art, which though very effective indeed has hitherto been almost entirely neglected, and which is now described for the first time in print in this lesson.

This consists of making

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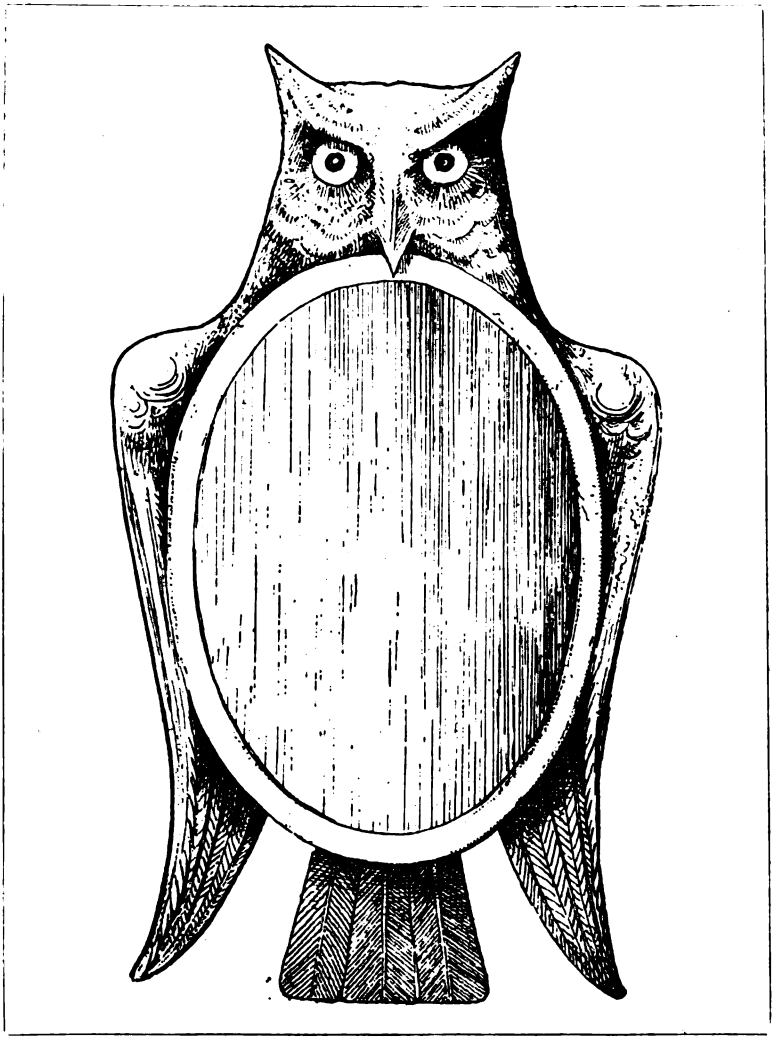

Fig. 42. MIRROR FRAME. STAMPED LEATHER WORK.

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imitations, let us say, for example, of fish, frogs, lizards, serpents, animals, mannikins, or the like, in wood or papier-maché, wax or cement, covering them with leather, working it as before described, and introducing or using them as ornaments in decorative work. Bernard Palissy, the potter, made a great reputation by simply imitating and colôuring fish, shells, and reptiles, in faience or crockery, and the same can be as well done in leather, which, when well made in animal forms, is not less durable than fictile ware, and, in fact, much less breakable. And if the reader will simply try what I shall here describe, he will find that this kind of work will be very successful.

It requires no great degree of skill to learn to model a frog, tortoise, or even a rabbit, in clay or wax, or to carve it out in soft wood. Children six or seven years of age, without any special gift or talent, do the latter in Switzerland so well that their work is in constant request. However, assuming that the student can make such an object, or buy or have it made for him, all that is necessary being that he has the mere *form* of one, it is easy to cover it with pieces of basil or russet leather, which have been steeped till quite soft, using paste or glue as an adhesive. When it is covered and nearly dry, line or stamp the surface, as in flat work.

Papier-maché consists of common newspaper or any kind of paper which is soft—the worst being consequently the best for this purpose. It is soaked in water, the longer the better, and may then be combined with paste, glue, or gum, so as to form a substance which can be made to assume any shape. Then it is, when dry of course, like card or paste-board. It can be mixed with other substances, such as porcelain clay, powdered soapstone, talc, or whiting, to give it body, and when submitted to pressure it becomes as hard as wood. Treated with sulphuric or nitric acid and water, paper and many other organic substances become of various degrees of hardness, from that of

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parchment, up to wood and ivory. A very perfect imitation of *nacre* or mother-of-pearl is thus made from rice. But objects

Fig. 43. SPILL CASE.

hard enough for leather work may easily be made from newspaper and paste, either by moulding or modelling by hand, which, though difficult at first, becomes easy after a few days' practice. When dry they are covered like those of wood.

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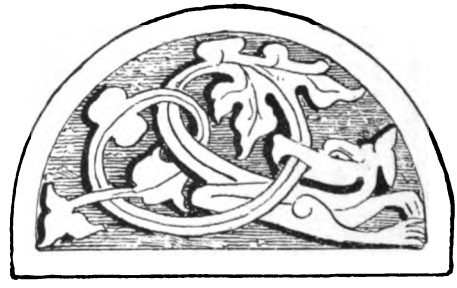
The reader having made, let us say, several frogs, fish or other objects in the round, from wood or papier-maché, and covered them with leather, let him then take a frame, salver or large round plate, cover it also with leather and fasten the objects to it. If well made it will all last for centuries, and a fall which would shatter porcelain or even wood carving will have no effect on it.

By exercising a little thought and ingenuity, the student cannot fail to find many ornaments or toys or objects, which, while they attract little attention in their natural condition, will look extremely well when covered with leather and introduced into ornamental work. It matters not of what substance these are made, metal, bone, or stone, so that they will bear covering.



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OF DESIGN AND PATTERNS FOR LEATHER WORK.

IT is a fact, verified by a considerable personal experience, that a very great majority of the persons who study the minor arts, such as wood carving, embossing, metal or leather work, do so with a most inadequate knowledge of design; and it is very common or almost usual, to find people who have worked for years, until they can execute "pieces" perfectly, who yet rely entirely on copied patterns, and whose skill perhaps just amounts to being able to trace and transfer these. Yet these very persons are the first to complain that their work "does not sell," or does not take prizes at exhibitions, when they are busy all the time in reproducing worn-out, familiar ideas. Now it is not enough in decoration to work well, or even to give graceful and beautiful patterns, if everybody knows them. People require novelty,

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especially if work is only executed by persons of less than remarkable skill.

Now it is not difficult to learn to design for oneself; yet among a hundred amateurs I have rarely found one who had ever given one hundredth part of the time devoted to carving or embossing, or embroidering, to learning to *draw patterns*, though this is in strictest truth ninety-nine parts out of a hundred of the real excellence of every kind of art-work.

Therefore I urge the pupil to study with care the "Manual of Design," referred to on page 2. They will find, if they do so attentively and practise what it teaches, that if they devote a small part of the time usually devoted to any art, to designing, and will take an *interest* in studying ornaments, that they will soon become artists and not mere Chinese-like drudges at art.

A few general directions as regards leather work, which are equally applicable to all other decorative arts, will be here in place.

If a piece of work be intended for a mural or wall decoration, or for a chair-back, or cabinet, or door-panel, that is, if it be a large piece intended to be seen as part of a room, generally at some feet or yards' distance, it is time lost to work it like a snuff-box or *étui*, or book or album cover. Yet this is what

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is *very generally* done, often because it will be admired by the ignorant who value decorative art work solely by the amount of mere *work* on it, and its "fineness." People do not take eye-glasses, or even put their eyes close to coal-scuttles or chair-

Fig. 44. ARABIC PATTERN.

backs, or footstools, to examine the patterns, therefore it is idle to put on these one or perhaps two or three borders in which the leaves or crochets are no larger than grains of rice, as is usual in all the ordinary shop patterns. Large work is not only easier to execute, but it also looks better, and is

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most profitable. That is, on the whole, the best work in which there is the most effect with the least labour.

Therefore do not invariably *quite* fill up your ground with patterns. When this is done to such an extent that the pattern is not to be taken in at a glance, it is overdone.

This does not apply to diaper grounds or those in which a small pattern is close set, nor to decoration intended to produce the uniform effect of close foliage; this is only of the nature of a ground, on which a larger pattern is brought out by the matting.

Nor does it apply to Celtic, or Norse, or Moorish patterns, of interlacing lines, although these should be so drawn that the design, as a whole, is readily perceptible.

Moorish or Arab designs (see fig. 44) are peculiarly well adapted to leather work, because the long lines in them of stems and leaves, or prolonged crochets (*i.e.*, leaf-like ornaments much developed) are easily *run* with the wheel or tracer at one effort, without ceasing. Leather work is, indeed, a specially Spanish-Moorish art, although a great proportion of the later stamped and coloured leather hangings of this school is sad trash.

It is not necessary that every person should perfect himself in every branch of leather work. The elaborate kinds of cut work are, in fact, elaborate picture making. But the simpler and larger varieties of it, which are quite as profitable and more generally useful, demand only a limited knowledge of design.

Avoid for some time designs in which there are many *in-lines* or inside work, such as the feathers of birds, the scales of fishes, and ornaments within ornaments. Children and feeble amateurs incline or take instinctively to such petty elaboration, because they by nature more easily comprehend details than the whole. They think it indicates "ingenuity" and industry. But the best application of both is to vigorous, large and original designs.

A single figure or floral design in a panel, which has taken not more than an hour, and perhaps less, to perfect, will often,

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or in fact generally does, look much better than the same space filled in closely with crowded work which has required a week to execute. This rule is not invariably applicable, but it should be always borne in mind, and it is as applicable to any other art as to leather work. It is true that there is much close work in the illustrations to this manual, but the object has been to give as many *motives* or ideas as possible in the least space. It is expected that every student will take out of a figure single crochets, sprays, or leaves, or single ornaments, and combine them into new forms. Nor is this in the least difficult. A child of six finds no difficulty in arranging leaves or flowers so as to form a garland or wreath, and if the pupil will simply draw a circle or triangle or cross, he may apply to it a repetition of any such ornament as follows:

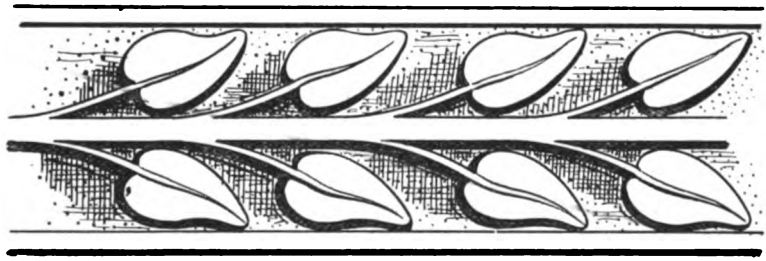

Fig. 45. A Simple Leaf Pattern.

Now this can be made in a circle or into a triangle, or run in any lines, and other leaves or ornaments be substituted for those shown. It will serve as a border, and by repeating it four times it will make a cross. Draw a circle round the cross and fill in the corners with the same leaves and we have a circular, or round ornament.

By thus taking a small part of a design or a small ornament, and recombining and arranging, *i.e.*, by ***multiplying it in order***, it

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Fig. 46. ADAPTATION OF SIMPLE LEAF PATTERN.

Fig. 47. PATTERN REPEATED FOUR TIMES

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will be found an easy matter, with a little practice, to compose very beautiful patterns.

It is a very easy matter, indeed, to merely learn how to work in leather, or sheet metal, or carve in wood, after purchased, or begged, or borrowed patterns. There are thousands who do this and are then astonished to find that they cannot dispose of their wares, and whether they wish to sell or not, end by ascertaining that they are producing nothing of real artistic value or interest. If they had devoted one-tenth of the time which they gave to work, to studying original design, to collecting graceful and novel *motives*, in short, if they had gone about it properly, they would always be able to produce something *valuable.*

There is something which should be seriously considered by all workers in the minor arts, be it in leather or wood carving or repoussé. This is, that mere manipulation or mastering the material is not everything, but only a preliminary stage to producing original results. Those who never advance beyond mere *skill* are only artisans, while those who zealously study design are artists. I have known not one but many ladies, who, having learned enough to work the metal or leather very well, went on for years turning out the same average work, and complaining that they did not progress, not knowing that a great deal of the celebrated work of the middle ages was actually inferior to theirs as regards mere *skill*, but superior in design. Mere finish or "skill" can be better produced by dies and machinery than by the most adroit workman, but original design, and bold free work, such as shows human thought and touch, are inspired by a knowledge of art, and familiarity with design. Therefore it should never be forgotten that there is a stage beyond mere *skill* —that of true original art—and that every effort should be made to attain to it. This stage beyond consists, not in mere skill in working metal, but in new and vigorous patterns or *designs*, and it is on this account that so few become artists.

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I have known a lady who could do repoussé admirably who was astonished to learn that *any* simple pattern when doubled, tripled, or otherwise multiplied, became an enlarged design well balanced, and that by such multiplying in "lobes," any given surface could be "spaced" or filled in. For the designs which are apparently the most difficult generally consist of simple elements combined or repeated. The whole problem lies in this nutshell—that almost all amateurs wish to execute work with the *least* possible exertion of thought, while the great aim of all minor or other arts should be to develop and exert it. And the only way in which this can be effectively done is to really master design, and always bear in mind that it is far beyond mere mechanical execution, being to the latter what soul is to body.

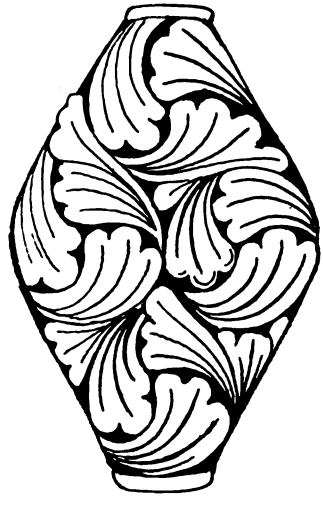

Fig. 48. DESIGN FOR COVER OF FLASK.

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BJECTS MADE OF LEATHER.—The student may bear it in mind that wherever paper, and we may almost say paint can be put, there leather may be applied. Also that in spite of the extent to which the decorative arts are now cultivated, we rarely see the panels of doors ornamented, that backs and seats of chairs when not plain are generally covered with trashy rococo designs of the kind, "such as we find suit our customers," and that few seem to reflect that broad strips of decorated surfaces or panels, placed at intervals on walls or over doors, half furnish a room by breaking in on blank surfaces. The objects chiefly made are pretty little presents, blotters, letter or card cases, slippers and purses, and the application of art, as in the middle ages, to *general* decoration is as yet chiefly in the hands of the upholsterer. There is no reason why the making of small objects should be neglected, but there are many why the making of mural or wall decoration should be very much more developed, and encouraged, the most practical of all being that it is much easier and looks better. Any pupil of very ordinary intelligence can learn in a week to outline, stamp and colour and varnish a large piece suitable for a screen if a good design be supplied.

Since to know what to go about, or what to make, is a very

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Fig. 49. ALBUM COVER—OLD ITALIAN.

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important part of all work,—corresponding to catching the hare,—the pupil may find the following alphabetical list very useful :

Acena. A square box on legs or supports. Very useful.

Fig. 50. SALAMANDER BELLOWS, OLD FRENCH PATTERN.

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Ædicula. A small house or tower, or castle used as a box. Very prettily made on a board base and covered. Outline stones, etc., with tracer.

Album covers. (See pages 19, 80.)

Alms-boxes.

Fig. 51. CABINET WITH PANELS OF STAMPED LEATHER.

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Ante-fix. Any ornament used to put before a defect in the wall, etc.

Appliqué. This consists of patterns cut out and gummed or sewn on a ground, which may be of leather, cloth, or even wood. Bookbinders' waste is very useful for such work.

Aprons. American Indians make these very prettily of soft (chamois) leather, embroidered ; appliqué leather or dye is also used.

Arms, Coats of, in shields.

Bags.

Baskets, covered with glue and thin wet leather, pushed in by sponge and hand.

Bellows. Any pair of bellows can be covered.

Blotters.

Book covers.

Boots, of sewn leather.

Fig. 52. A CARD-CASE. CUT AND PRESSED LEATHER, WITH COLOURED LINES. MODERN VIENNESE WORK.

Borders. These from one inch to a foot in breadth may be used for frieze or cornice ornaments or to surround panels, edges of boxes, etc. Most of the designs at the heads of the chapters in this book can be adapted to this purpose.

Bottles, covered with basil.

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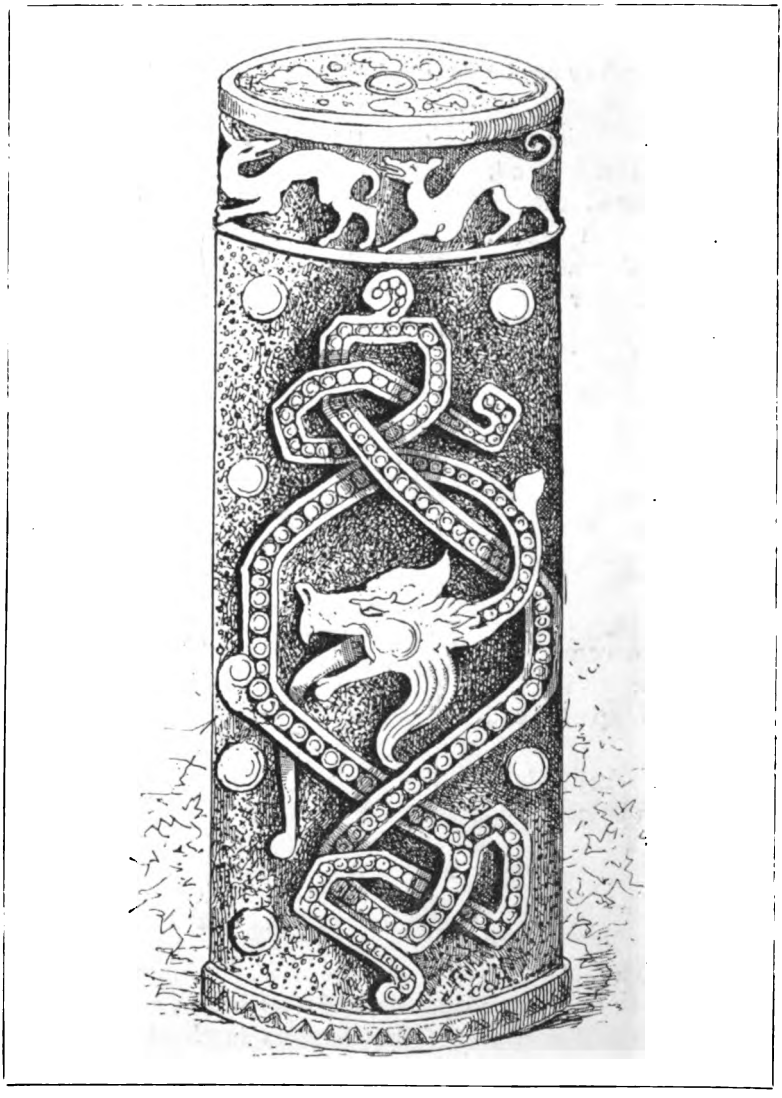

Fig. 53. BOX FOR PENCILS, ETC.

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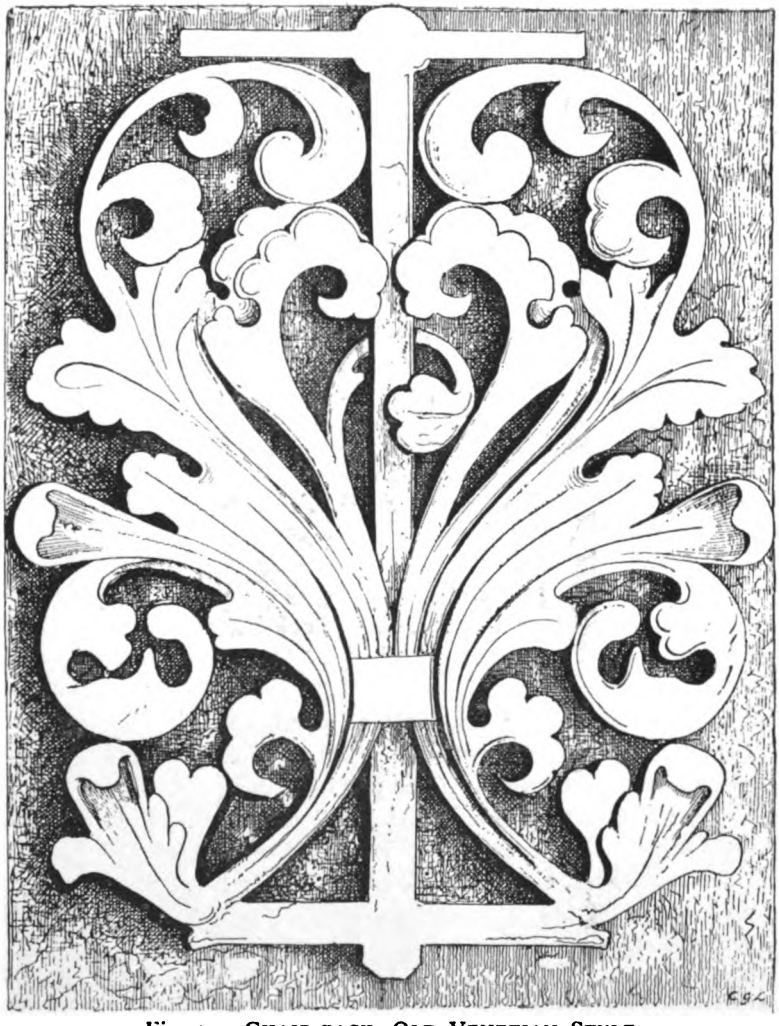

Fig. 54. CHAIR-BACK, OLD VENETIAN STYLE.

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Boxes. Almost any box can be covered and worked; of these are hanging boxes, for walls, flat square for stationery, etc. Also those to contain books, a favourite design in the middle ages of thick *cuir-bouilli.* Coal, wood and salt boxes.

Brackets and Bracket shelves.

Brick. Covered with leather for door-weight.

Brush and broom, etc., handles. Use hard leather.

Cabinets. Of all sizes. Corner cabinets. (See Fig. 51.)

Card Cases. (See Fig. 52.)

Cases, Dressing.

Cases for letters, music, travelling, instruments, eye-glasses and spectacles.

Caskets, in great variety. (See pp. 35, 42.)

Casks. Covered with leather for waste-paper, etc.

Chair seats and backs. (See pp. 60, 85.)

Chimney-piece hangings. Very pretty with figures of men and animals in arabesques.

Cigar boxes, caskets, etc.

Cloak cases, facings, etc.

Coal and wood boxes, of thick hard black leather.

Coignes, corner brackets.

Comb and brush boxes.

Covers for books, albums, blotters, portfolios.

Crosses. Often made of deeply stamped and worked leather in the fourteenth century. (See p. 31.)

Cups, Vases, etc., covered with basil or russet. (See Fig. 40, p. 65, etc.)

Cushions. Flat, either square or round, for travelling.

Dice boxes.

Dog collars.

Door pieces. Panels just as long as a door is wide, of any breadth. To hang above doors or windows, to fill spaces, being for this very effective. (See Fig. 15, p. 22, etc.)

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Easter Eggs. Wooden boxes for Easter presents, commonly covered with leather in Vienna.

Eye-glass, etc., cases.

Flasks for liquor or gunpowder, etc., also Pilgrims' bottles (p. 78).

Frames. Great ingenuity may be displayed in picture-frames. (See p. 67.)

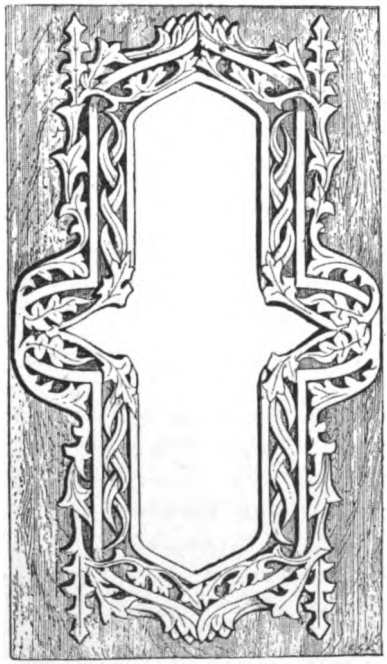

Fig. 55. FRAME. OLD FRENCH ORNAMENT.

Fig. 56. HORN COVERED WITH STAMPED LEATHER.

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Friezes. Friezes and borders may be manufactured very rapidly by using circular rollers or cylinders, on which the pattern is cut in intaglio, as on a stamp.

Girdles. Belts.

Guitar and Violin or Lute cases. These now ugly objects were prominent ornaments three centuries since, when they were covered with worked leather.

Handles of Umbrellas, etc.

Hanging boxes, ampels, baskets. (See Fig. 57.)

Hangings for walls, shelves, etc.

Horns. Covered with basil. (See Fig. 56.[1])

Images of almost any kind can be covered with basil and worked.

Instrument cases.

Jars of all kinds, covered with basil.

Kettle-holders.

Key boxes or key cabinets (*Vide* "Wood Carving," by Charles G. Leland, for a curtailed description).

Lead pencil cases for artists.

Lecterns. Church reading desks can be beautifully ornamented with *cuir-bouilli,* which should be dark or black.

Leggings.

Letter-cases.

Lunettes. Half round or semi-circular spaces over doors, etc., which can be filled with ornaments.

Mannikins. Figures of dwarfs, men, etc., sawn out of thin board, covered with basil, worked, and used for mural and other ornaments, as *appliqués.* Any animals, harps, roses, etc., may be thus made.

Masks. Any mask or face covered with leather makes a hanging ornament, etc.

[1] The motto on the specimen given is translated from an old German proverb, "See that ye get (or take) not out of the little end of the horn," alluding to a custom by which the loser in a wager drank from the small end.

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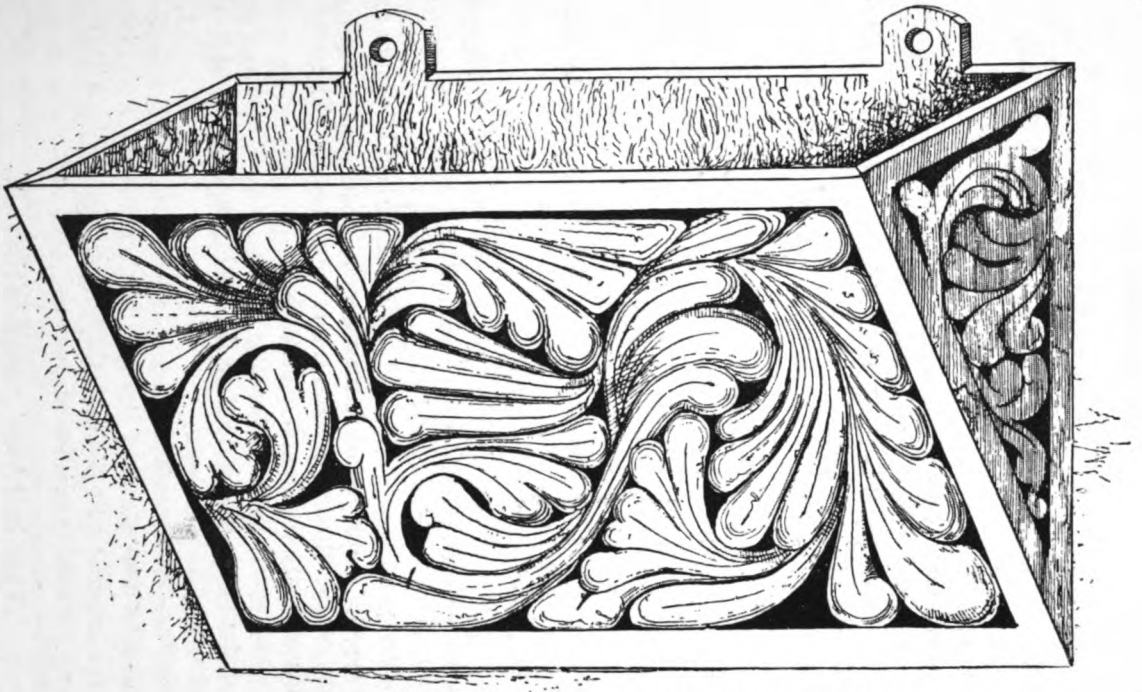

Fig. 57. HANGING BOX. STAMPED LEATHER, PAINTED GROUND.

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Mirrors, hand. Can be very beautifully covered with thin *hard* leather, and adorned with Etruscan subjects, cut and coloured.

Money boxes.

Monopodium. A small round centre-table.

Music-cases.

Nail heads of metal of different kinds form good ornaments to heighten the effect of leather work.

Needle-cases.

Opera-glass cases.

Panels. Any broad spaces.

Paper or Stationery boxes.

Paper-weights. May be made of large pebbles, iron pound weights, etc., covered with basil.

Paper-weights, of iron, etc., covered with basil.

Photograph mounts and cases.

Pilgrim bottles.

Pillows.

Plaques.

Portfolio covers.

Portières. Hangings for doors.

Pouches, hand bags, sacks, etc. A great variety of design and work may be employed on these objects.

Reliquaries. Small chests in the form of houses. These were covered with black and stamped leather.

Ring boxes. Circular boxes like rings.

Rolls. Flat pieces of leather for rolling up and tying work, papers, music, or drawings.

Round boxes or cylinders.

Roundels. Flat plates of stamped leather used for fruit plates. (See pp. 25, 26.) Sometimes they have inscribed on them a rhyming fortune, or prediction, such as:

Thou hast loved manye in the past,
A shrewe ere long will holde thee fast.

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Fig. 58. PLAQUE TO BE USED AS A CARD TRAY.

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Fig. 59. UMBRELLA STAND, ETC.

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Screens.
Seats of chairs, stools, or crichets.
Sewing baskets or cases.
Shoes or slippers.
Sofa backs or guards. A kind of curtain.
String Boxes.
Strips or ribbons of leather, worked with a cylinder roller, are very useful for borders.
Table covers.
Tankards.
Tobacco pouches or caskets.
Travelling cases.
Trays.
Umbrella covers, cases, or stands.
Wreaths of sheet leather, flowers and leaves.

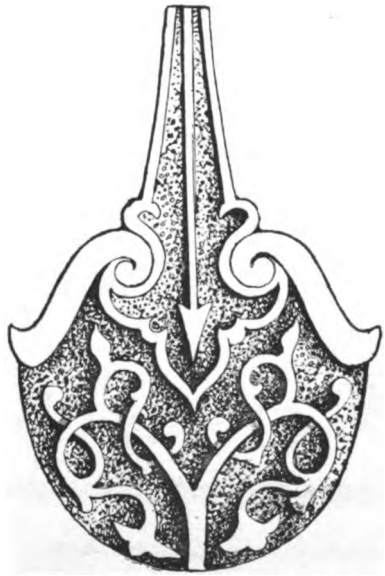

Fig. 60. HALF COCOA-NUT COVERED WITH STAMPED LEATHER.

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